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## ABSTRACT

Focusing on both the theoretical and practical aspects of teaching children and adolescents to write effectively, the papers in this report originated as speeches delivered at a conference on English and language arts instruction. The 12 papers deal with the following topics: the composing process as communication, the cognitive and biological aspects of composing, the relationship of the professional to the child and the writing process, modes of response to student writing, how to use focus in the writing process, what children say about their writing, the effect of external events on children's choices of writing topics, three effective writing programs, children's interests in writing, an ongoing formative evaluation of student writing, differences in the written expression of boys and girls, and the writing process in the open classroom. (MAI)

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# The Writing Processes of Students

Report of  
the

Annual Conference on Language Arts

State University of  
New York at Buffalo

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Walter T. Petty  
and  
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*Co-Editors*

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## Introduction

This volume is the result of an interest we have had for a long time: the institution of a yearly conference on English/Language Arts Education and the publishing of the papers presented at it. Last March 15 the first conference was held. Hopefully this volume will be the first of a series reporting future conferences.

This year the subject of teaching children and young people to write effectively and the processes that occur as they write has caught the attention of the profession. Perhaps the attention is a result of deterioration of writing instruction in schools; at least some classroom teachers and classroom observers think the instruction is less effective than it formerly was. Perhaps the interest in writing is due to our general concern with learning processes, what persons do as they seek to learn something. Possibly the concern is based on an element of both, or perhaps there were other factors operating. In any case, the speakers and the audience at the conference proved that there is considerable professional interest in "The Writing Processes of Students."

The speakers at the conference focused on both the theoretical and the practical. Several reviewed or reported on research, others gave accounts of classroom practices. While all gave attention to the processes of writing, the phrase was not defined identically by all. We believe all of the papers will be of interest, many will provide ideas worth trying, and many will provoke further thought and research.

Patrick J. Finn  
Walter T. Petty

# The Writing Processes of Students

NO. 1

1975

*Report of the  
Annual Conference on Language Arts  
State University of New York at Buffalo*

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## Composing — A New Emphasis for the Schools

by

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Composing is *not* spelling. It is *not* grammar, not usage, not manuscript, not penmanship, not writing neat little snatches of perfectly formed sentences. It is neither writing with "two-inch margins," nor writing with perfect alignment. It is not rhetorical analysis of selected prose passages, nor is it completing a careful sequence of exercises on paragraph organization. Composing is none of these things.

The nation's schools are filled with children who can write grammatically perfect sentences that say absolutely nothing. These pupils, like many of their teachers, have been so concerned about the superficialities of writing and about the ability to analyze the writing of others that they have confused the forms of writing with the essence, and without the essence, the expression of personal ideas and feelings through language, the formal characteristics do not matter. This is not to say that grammar and usage and punctuation and rhetorical analysis may not have a place, indeed in the latter instance a most significant place in a total program of composition. But it is to say that unless we look more closely and carefully at the uniquely creative and personal nature of the processes of composing, we run the danger of stressing more and more in our programs the aspects of composition which matter less and less in terms of our pupils' ultimate growth.

This point of view is the legacy of my work during the past decade and it is the one which I should bring to the classroom were I to begin teaching again tomorrow. It reflects my own gradually growing awareness that many of the motions which I once mistook for the teaching of composition were only tangentially related to the process of composing itself. During the eight-and-a-half years with the National Council of Teachers of English, I struggled for better teaching conditions to make possible more thorough paper correction, worked with the Commission on English to clarify the perimeters of our subject, sat through necessary but disorderly squabbles as one new grammatical approach yielded to another, saw the study of rhetoric climb back into scholarly and professional favor, strove for extensive federally-sponsored institute programs so that elementary and secondary teachers of English might be better prepared in their subject, and cooperated in the development of programs in more than

twenty curriculum centers which sought to make their model lessons available to the schools. The tasks were rich and rewarding, and the experience has surely extended my own thinking about the nature of programs in composition. In publishing during recent years, I have had the additional opportunity to think deeply about the kinds of instructional materials and instructional tools that will most help teachers improve the writing of their pupils. I have also had, during NCTE days, the opportunity to study the teaching of composition in the classrooms of selected American high schools known for the excellence of their programs in English and to compare their work in composing with practices emphasized in selected British schools. Fortunately the comparative cross-national study of secondary school practices has been followed during recent years by less formal observation and study of elementary school practice and materials, where I find differences only in degree. At both elementary and secondary-school levels, the differences within each country are largely differences in degree. The contrast from country to country is — in large measure — both startling and disturbing.

American teachers rely heavily on the write-correct-revise syndrome of instruction, particularly after about grade 4. Lessons in composition are meticulously scheduled and methodically conducted, often on a regularized weekly cycle. Papers are frequently restricted to a single mode of expository prose, the prose which teachers believe the high schools and later colleges demand, and are corrected and annotated with considerable precision. Indeed, most instruction in how to write occurs during the *correction* process, *not before*, with better teachers carefully directing attention to paragraph organization and to development of ideas as well as to diction, spelling, and mechanics. Inevitably in the better schools the corrected papers are carefully revised by pupils and filed for subsequent reference. Then the same pattern of instruction begins anew. Care is taken to see that various organizational skills are stressed in the assignments of each class, often through predetermined sequences. Most likely these are repeated each year with little evidence of improvement beyond that emerging from the students' growing maturity. The result is a nine or ten-year program in composition that is awesome in its regularity and complexity, self-defeating in the burden it places on teacher time, and lacking in zest and excitement for the pupils. Writing is hard work. Conscientious teachers know it, as they stagger under mountains of papers requiring individual attention. Conscientious American pupils know it, as they confront the national problem of all pupils in English: how to find something worth saying and still satisfy the rhetorical and grammatical demands of unity, coherence, and emphasis which is the American norm.

But British students and teachers seem not to know it! Far from being sequential and carefully planned, their writing programs are free, spontaneous, and erupt continuously from other class work. The time that

Americans spend in grading papers is devoted rather in Britain to creating new situations for writing. The British teacher engages children in argument or emotional experience, ideas flow freely, and at some point or another — often at the suggestion of pupils themselves — writing begins. Papers are read, shared, and talked about, but seldom are they annotated by teachers, and almost never revised. "Why ask a child to rewrite one paper," say our British counterparts, "when they could better be writing another?" And why should they divert attention to the formal aspects of composing, they feel, when they wish to concentrate on the communication itself. Nor does expository prose command exclusive attention. Indeed many British teachers deny the rigid classifications which American teachers docilely accept — the separation of objective and emotional forms of writing, personal and practical writing, creative and expository writing. What matters, they feel, is that the student-writer have something to feel and express in language, that he be continually expanding his emotional and intellectual experience in language, not his practice with particular forms. The distinction between expressive and non-expressive language is virtually the only distinction that many of these teachers recognize. Thus poetic, narrative, and dramatic writing are as common as any other, and the choice is normally left to the writer.

The result of this point of view is not only much writing, but electric, vital writing, fresh imagery, more mechanical errors to be sure at the equivalent of our intermediate and upper grade levels (although these decline in the later years), and a writing program that involves both students and teachers in what they do. The young people enjoy expressing their ideas and the teachers respond with excitement of their own. The teachers' energies are directed to the creation of the writing situation, the classroom atmosphere that may give birth to ideas. They spend little time on marking student papers. And the vitality of the teachers is enhanced by the fact that they are not worn down through the endless correction and annotation of pupil papers. Forced to choose between paper correction and preparation for teaching, they inevitably opt for preparation. Would that more American teachers were making the same choice!

Observing the teaching of composition in the better American schools is like reading a set of "C+" or "B-" papers. The teaching is thorough, competent, conscientious, steady, and just a bit dull. Observing similar teaching in England is like reading "A" and "A+" papers. Not all the situations created by teachers result in the spontaneous excitement for which they strive, but when the planning works, the resulting enthusiasm is something to see. Their classes are frequently exciting, sometimes chaotic, and invariably interesting. One American said, "It seemed that every class was a kind of happening."

This background is necessary, I think, to understand what I would do with a class today in trying to help students learn to compose. Inevitably,

the true mean in composition teaching must lie somewhere between these British and American extremes, and it would be such a balance that I would ultimately seek. But I would begin first — at the intermediate and upper grades — by trying to help American pupils unlearn or overcome the accumulation of negative attitudes and negative learnings about writing built during previous years of schooling. How this might be accomplished would depend, I think, on the particular pupils in the class. It might be that I would spend the first portion of a school year on fairly free, unassigned, and uncorrected writing about ideas important to the pupils; writing to be read to one another but not to be corrected or revised, writing in any form that the pupil wished.

Beyond this, I would base my program on four critical principles:

1. *More time should be spent on what happens before pupils write than on what happens after they write.* Too much of our attention presently is centered on the products of writing assignments, rather than on the processes of writing, and it is the process that we are essentially trying to improve. The average teacher — beginning at the intermediate levels — with an average class of 30 pupils spends an average of 10 minutes annotating each paper for any average paper, a total of 300 minutes — or 6 teaching hours — probably 10 to 20 times as much time as he can lavish on creating the composing situation itself. And he achieves only average results. He does this, I believe, because he is conscientious and because he has been conditioned to think that the acts of correction and revision are essential, perhaps primary to the teaching of writing.

Essential as annotation may be in the total process, it is only part of the whole. It probably increases in importance as children grow older and may serve a real purpose in the high school as some discipline in the use of language begins to assert itself. In earlier years whatever "red pencilling" is planned should occur in conference with the child — not separately and returned like hieroglyphics to be deciphered or ignored. More important than showing a student writer how he went wrong is showing him how to go right. The act of invention, of discovery and organization of ideas, of finding something to say — and of finding how to say something — cannot be taught by red pencil *after* the writing is already done.

I should like to suggest that if young people are to learn to express their own ideas and feelings, they will need help in searching for these ideas and for ways of expressing ideas. They will need help in identifying their feelings and how to give voice to them. Before beginning to write, children need careful preparation. A single hour of preparation seldom seems to me enough for any important piece of writing; a single minute, a printed topic, a hastily conceived topic offers little more than an exercise in frustration.

Often writing can grow out of the shared experience of reading (say a collection of science-fiction stories); or a field trip, such as the fourth

graders' sampling of polluted waters in the Sacramento River of California that I visited not too long ago. Or it can be stimulated by a desire to create and publish — picture books perhaps for children in a local hospital. Interpreting what was composed and said in a film, a photographic picture story, a collage has always been an almost "sure fire" way of inspiring the "reluctant" writers. As the NCTE Commission on Composition notes, "Various kinds of activities related to composition contribute to the student's ability to write — film making, debates, collecting material for notebooks, library investigation, dramatics, field trips, television, and film viewing." However, "the attractions of such activities — because of their novelty or because they seem to gain more immediate student interest — should not be allowed to supersede instruction in writing." Above all, teachers need to search for ways of building on the children's own background, the experience they bring to class, their sensitivity to every day events (the things they haven't noticed before). Children cannot be expected to write words that they haven't heard before. They cannot be expected to write thoughts that they haven't thought before. Sensitizing children to events and the experiences in their daily life and helping them to develop and use the language labels needed to manipulate and structure this experience is essential in building the capacity to compose.

Small wonder then that the best writing seems to grow slowly and carefully out of an individual's own experience. Whether these experiences are literary or personal matters less to me than that they be deeply felt and deeply believed. If so, the writing will carry conviction. Nothing so quickly betrays the inadequacy of many of today's writing programs than the lifeless, superficial, barren prose used so often to cloak pseudo-ideas which the student writer rarely feels.

Again and again research validates this basic emphasis on the experience of the writer. The January (1975) *Elementary English*, for example, reports Margaret Sawkin's study of differences between fifth-grade writers of high quality compositions and low quality compositions as follows:

- Writers of compositions of high quality tend to be more concerned with the content of written expression, with ideas, with organization within the story, and with the function of beginning and ending sentences.
- Writers of compositions of low quality tend to be more concerned with the mechanics of writing, particularly spelling, punctuation, and capitalization, encounter more problems when writing, and rewrite their compositions more frequently.

Attention to ideas, then, wide reading and evaluation of the ideas in the reading, careful discussion, progression from identification of experiences to discussion of experiences to writing about experiences — such prewriting activity seems essential in a sound program. And none of these

can really be taught by annotation of papers and revision of papers, no matter how great the effort we expend. What we do before children write is probably more important than what we do after they write.

2. *The composition programs should be based on more reading of children's writing and on what we know about writing by children, less on the reading and study of adult models.*

During the past decade or so, the revival in rhetoric and rhetorical studies is offering us many new insights about the nature of discourse. We have a generative rhetoric of the English paragraph, transformational sentence combining, tagmemic study of the contexts of writing, a restatement of Aristotlean logic, and ever so many other new insights. Well and good, of course, in extending the teacher's insight into his own writing, for these new rhetorical approaches are based almost entirely on the study of adult models, often specimens of the most mature and sophisticated stylists and craftsmen who have written in the English tongue. Indeed rhetoricians themselves by the very nature of the discipline devote virtually their entire efforts to analyzing mature prose passages selected from printed texts. Almost all of this analysis deals with the final product, not with the process itself. Almost all deals with the writing of adults. But how much can these scholars tell us about the rhetoric of writing by children — or about the process in which children engage (at the third grade, the sixth, or the ninth) as they struggle to communicate. Most rhetoricians and most books on rhetoric, like most literary critics and books on criticism, can help us to analyze specimens of English prose. But an analysis of the prose of Lord Chesterton, Ernest Hemingway, Winston Churchill, or even James Reston may help us more to understand their writings as literature than help our young people learn to write like Chesterton, Hemingway, Churchill, or Reston. Reject the rhetoricians then? I say not. But let us use their insights more to suggest ways for the teacher to study the writing of children than as subject matter to be taught directly in a program designed to teach young people to write. (Like methods of criticism, the methods of rhetorical analysis may help young people learn to read; they surely will help the teacher in organizing a composition program. But it seems increasingly doubtful if they can be more successful in teaching the would-be writer of English prose than are methods of criticism in teaching the writer of verse.)

On what then can our programs of composition be based if not the rhetorical analysis of standard prose? Much more, I think, on the study and reading of writing by children — on the rhetorical analysis of their own writing. Until we learn to listen to the modes of our children's discourse, we are not likely to discover the problems they encounter in communicating. Until we have a generative rhetoric of *their* paragraphs, we are not likely to know how best to help them through such an approach. The freshness of the metaphors used by some young writers can quicken

even the severest critic's heart. Let us look to those metaphors — at how they are used and how not used. Let us follow children's writing through the grades. Let our rhetoricians join us, if they will, in building a developmental rhetoric on which school instruction can be based. Let us avoid excessive reliance on adult models — substituting in their place good models of writing by children and young people. Witness the impressive results now being reported as a result of practice in sentence combining when children work with their own sentences.

Let us be even more wary about the prescriptive arbitrary "cookbook" prescriptions for writing — six ways of organizing a paragraph, the four modes of discourse, the ten steps to effective composition. At best based on rhetorical analysis of specimens of adult writing, they are arbitrary and, I think, incapable of application even by most adults. Janet Emig's studies of various patterns of composing, which she may discuss later at this conference, shows how few writers follow the codified advice. Wallace Douglas demonstrated in some of his excellent curriculum materials developed at Northwestern University that prescriptive advice is not followed even by recognized adult writers. This does not mean that we should not talk with children about writing more vivid sentences — sentences that offer the reader a clearer picture of the writer's thoughts, ideas, and feelings — or that we should not show children how to write dialogue or to use quotation marks; but an increasing number of specialists in language development now believe that children who increasingly use language to express their own feelings and ideas will become very particular about how they use language for others, and will thus ultimately find the motive to assimilate the various mechanical and social conventions of writing. Proficiency in using conventions of written language (edited American English) thus will come as a by-product of self-discovery.

Children will, of course, need experience in using language of many kinds — not only the rather narrow language of school books or the conventional classroom. This is one important contribution that the current emphasis on "The Students' Right to His Own Language" can make to school programs. Whatever position individual communities take on such matters, it is clear that the variety of English (the dialect) spoken in the home and which each child brings to school is earning a new respect, for it is being recognized as a continuing means of communication within a social and cultural group. Brought to the classroom by each child, it presents an opportunity for the whole class to accept and respond to language differences. And when such differences become "interesting," a valuable new area of language expansion is opened up to students' curiosity and to their own exploration of language — oral and written.

In short then, school programs would be based on the language of our students and on the processes in which they must engage.

3. A program in composing should recognize no false dichotomy between imaginative and expository writing.

A fourth grade girl responds to the experience of rejection elicited by the story *The Hundred Dresses*. She wishes to express her resentment of the insensitivity of man to man, to link the feelings of the protagonist to her own reservoir of emotion, to cry out as a social reformer in urging her peers to recognize their own brutalities. Does she write a tract? Perhaps. A poem? Quite possibly. A personal essay in which poetry and prose are artfully blended to secure maximum effect? Many girls would.

The invisible boundaries between prose and poetry, between the personal and impersonal, between imaginative and expository are boundaries set largely by adult specialists in classification and analysis. The young writer on his own recognizes no such limitations when he thinks and feels deeply about what he is writing. Only when we teachers insist on imposing boundaries on personal expressions is the student-writer conscious of them — and then often conscious of the wrong things. We all know the wretched verse with its emphasis on rhyme and external form that comes when children write poetry at our insistence with no inner compulsion to look on life in fresh, imaginative ways. Witness the disservice to poetry performed by requiring children to emulate *Haiku*, a most sophisticated genre and one that few ten-year-olds are able to enter with any degree of emotion. We might question whether such assignments deal with real poetic form at all. Thus, too, the careless personal reminiscences engendered by thoughtless, too often repeated topics for writing (such as *When I Won the Game*, *My Most Embarrassing Moment*). What better way to force the substitution of superficial for genuine thought and feeling than through trite, hackneyed theme topics of this kind!

Real writing, genuine writing springs from deep personal conviction — the desire to express something to someone. Voice and stance, attitude toward subject, awareness of audience — these are important, albeit our recognition of their presence sometimes comes after the fact. But most important of all is an engagement with ideas on the part of the writer, an internal struggle to give form and shape in effective ways to the meaning he wishes to express.

Whenever this happens, writing is above all personal, however controlled its external form. The arbitrary barriers between creative and practical writing — barriers imposed from without rather than within — seem less important than providing balanced experiences in writing — sometimes describing feelings, sometimes relating experiences, sometimes grappling with abstract ideas, sometimes responding to a work of art. If the student-writer really has something he wants to say, he will strive toward finding appropriate form, and surely the forms will vary for different writers and different styles. Hence, exaggerated concern with limiting the kinds of experiences in writing, with different modes of adult

discourse, with too much imaginative writing and too little expository or analytical writing seem to me to force the attention to the externals, rather than to the all important problem of achieving a balance in the kinds of writing experiences our children need.

It is true, of course, that as the child grows older he needs to be introduced to different kinds of situations in which language of various kinds is used. One of the most interesting and comprehensive attempts to provide for the varied situations in which people encounter language has been attempted by the *Language in Use* project of the Schools Council in the United Kingdom. In nine different areas of language use, United Kingdom teachers introduce "mini units" or language encounters that engage children in using language in different ways. For example:

*Language and Experience:* as in sports reporting or describing a film

*Language and Information:* as in weather reporting

*Language and Social Behavior:* as in using language for social amenities such as in addressing elderly persons

*Speech in Action:* as in television interviews

But even in a variety of encounters with language, an individual can be expressive or not, self-involved or not. He need not be restricted as he is urged to compose his thoughts and feelings.

4. Finally, the program should recognize the intensely individual nature of the composing process.

Writing is after all an individual's attempt to express and communicate his personal attitudes, ideas, and feelings. The emphasis here must be on the individual. Programs that so sublimate the individual to the group — in what is assigned, in what is expressed, in what is taught, in how sequence is achieved — will ultimately be less successful in developing ability to compose than programs which free individual expression.

This is not easy to achieve within the large groups that we daily face. But some new ideas suggest that it can be done. Alternative assignments may help, giving the child some flexibility in determining his own topics and forms. So may making a greater attempt to relate writing topics to some continuing discussion of ideas. The possibility of engaging individuals with ideas is considerably heightened if one has more time to develop insights than is provided through the usual ten or fifteen minutes.

I would also manage the classroom to provide frequent writing conferences between teacher and student, and use the informal conference to discuss the unique problems and insights revealed by each student in a whole collection of compositions. To make this manageable, I would urge children to maintain folders or collections of writing so that such conferences could be based on samples of a variety of pieces of writing. Aides sometimes can be used to advantage. Ultimately, I would annotate and comment on some writing, of course, but often, perhaps always in the presence of children in conference. I am not convinced that the red-

pencilled marks have much meaning except when pupils understand why they are written.

I am impressed, too, with some of the writing laboratory approaches being introduced throughout the nation. At upper levels some schools devote an occasional hour or even two to writing permitting young people a chance to develop their ideas in writing, allowing the teacher time to move around the class, conferring with individuals as the need arises, helping each class member with his own individual problems, at the time when he most needs help, at the time when he is actually composing.

Other schools set aside special classroom centers for writing, centers equipped with the tools that student writers may need — desks grouped together to facilitate the exchange of ideas; paper, pens, and pencils; typewriters perhaps for older children to assist in the problem of preparing readable manuscript; reference books needed in writing (dictionaries, including a dictionary of synonyms, etc.). In addition to time to write, space to write, and tools for writing, some special laboratories often provide consultant help — a specially endowed aide or a teacher interested in writing who is informed about the problems of composing and able to confer individually with young people about their special concerns. Admittedly this use of the special teacher is most appropriate in middle or upper school years.

Whether the writing in such laboratories or laboratory periods is assigned by the regular teacher, or whether topics are identified by a special writing laboratory director seems less important than that opportunities be provided to help each individual with his own special problems in learning to write. Almost any reorganization of scheduling will be successful if it enables us to cope more directly with the writing problems of young people, to teach the processes of writing in ways related to the writing problems of individuals.

I have tried to suggest that the thrust in composing should be away from the rigid mechanical drudgery into which such programs too often fall. I have tried to say that it is a *process* of expressing and shaping experience with which we must deal and that this process is uniquely related to the personal attitudes of each writer. I have tried to say that our efforts to teach writing may be greatly hampered by too narrow a concentration on the products of writing, especially adult writing, and too little attention to the linguistic and composing processes of our children.

By looking at what children are trying to say, by finding ways to work and respond to them as individuals, we stand a chance of liberating our programs in composition from the lifeless tyranny which they sometimes impose on teachers and students today. And I would say it is this liberation of composition from all that is lifeless and stilted and mechanical and unrelated to genuine feeling and thought that must be our greatest goal in the programs we create for tomorrow.

## The Biology of Writing: Another View of the Process

by

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A supremely complex and multi-faceted activity' — that is one recent description of writing, the subject, object, and process of our concern in this conference. (Gardner, 1975: p. 119) What sources of data provide our characterization of the process? Are there additional sources to tap? If so, what are these and what contribution might they make? Do these known and new sources provide the foundation for a theory of the writing process? These are the questions I will examine in this paper.

Our chief current source of information about the writing process, a review of the research makes clear, is the case-study, involving one writer or a small sample of writers who, not at all incidentally, are usually young and non-professional. Whether or not I was literally the first to use case-study to examine the writing processes of students, I do not know: I think it can be said however that my study made the method attractive, one might even say chic. I know of at least nine inquiries using case-study that cite mine as springboard, including five dissertations: there may well be more. These works include studies by Burgess (1973), Hale (1974), McLeod (1974), and Mischel (1974) and five dissertations (Bodkin, in progress; Goswami, in progress; Graves, 1973; Stallard, 1972; and Weaver, 1973). Stallard (1974) published an article based on his dissertation.

Some say vaguely about any popularity from tie-dyed jeans to research methodology, 'There must be something in the air.' But the appeal of case-study in English education research can, I think, be accounted for. As I have suggested elsewhere, case-study taps for many of us both natural and schooled strengths and talents. (Emig, 1973) It also eludes a major weakness. First, information is acquired through alert and sensitive observation; and many of us have been trained to heed what is around us. We look. We note. Our perceptions are honed.

Second, case-study honors good writing: the best in the research read as compellingly as the best fiction — I think here of Bettelheim's account (1967) of Joey the machine boy; or of Erikson (1950) on Luther or Gorky or of Erikson (1969) on Gandhi. While we may not be stylists of their stature, many of us write reasonably well, particularly in the narrative mode that case-study often employs.

Case-study as a method also eludes a major academic weakness in that it tends to be qualitative rather than quantitative in its approach to data. And, unfortunately, many of us trained initially as English majors were almost encouraged to be mathematical and statistical blanks, as if not knowing something about mathematics and statistics were truly defensible for anyone undeniably living in a technological society.

Scientists and mathematicians, by the way, tend to have a far greater knowledge of the humanities than the humanists have of science and mathematics. The British physicist and novelist C.P. Snow noted this difference about ten years ago in his study *The Two Cultures* (1964). My own experience with colleagues supports his contention. Not to know seems especially ironic for humanists, a group who prides itself on breadth of vision, and culture.

A current more intricate statement about the necessity of wedding humanism and science (more specifically, of rhetoric and technology) is Robert Pirsig's original and important *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* (1974). It should I think become required reading in all manner of graduate seminars, assuredly those we conduct in English education research.

Earlier, I noted that there have been a number of recent studies using case-history. These thus far can be divided into duplications and replications of my inquiry. Duplications take as a given my category system: for example, categories such as *stopping* or *teacher influence*. These categories however were, and are, not chiseled on Sinai. Rather, they were derived inductively: that is, I examined the data and found within them, or so I thought at the time, certain superordinates around which information could be clustered and organized. They were tentative and early efforts to set forth what I had found. Do duplications of *The Composing Processes* forward our understanding of the writing process? Yes, in the limited sense that confirming what I had found with eight students with another ten or twelve probably increases the validity of the original findings. At the same time, there might be in these duplications that research phenomenon which could be dubbed 'The Procrustean Principle': that data tend to fit within established categories.

Replications, in contrast, involve by definition devising an original category system; for if replication means that researchers follow the model exactly, they too must proceed inductively and devise their own characterization of the data through a fresh category system.

When others have replicated, rather than duplicated, they have, it turns out, produced divergent and creative characterizations; and have, consequently, made a more substantial contribution to our understanding. Let me cite two examples: the first is *The Composing Processes of English Teacher Candidates: Responding to Freedom and Constraint*, a doctoral dissertation written by Frances Weaver in 1973 at the University of

Illinois; the second, also submitted in 1973, is Donald Graves's prize-winning study, written at the State University of New York at Buffalo under the chairmanship of Walter Petty, *Children's Writing: Research Directions and Hypotheses Based upon an Examination of the Writing Processes of Seven-Year-Old Children*.

Weaver examines the writing processes of English teacher candidates by noting their responses to certain teacher-initiated stimulus tasks and by attempting to categorize these, as she puts it, 'in a way useful for generating a theory about the initial stages of the act of writing.' One of the important contributions of this study, in addition to the characterization she suggests of the initial stages of the process, is its cataloging of when teachers can be of some help to some students during the writing process.

Here are the three occasions Weaver notes:

1. When the teacher can identify the rhetorical occurrences that the student is struggling to effect;
2. When the teacher is capable of assuming the role of a representative of the student's prospective audience;
3. When the teacher has heard the authentic voice of the student writer and knows the techniques for making it clearer, stronger, or more appropriate. (p. 93)

The values of Graves's study for examining the writing process are almost too various to set forth here. Let me cite just a few: First, there is the scrupulousness of his observation as well as the humanity of his vision. Second, there is the size and width of his study directly and intimately involving 94 seven-year-olds. But perhaps the most promising aspect is the new direction for research represented by his characterization of the young writers, with the focus upon the writer rather than upon the processes they are engaged in (see Graves in this volume for these characterizations of 'reactive' and 'reflective' writers).

In addition to the new directions marked by these two studies, there are at least two others we probably should consider. We need studies of adult writers, both the unsophisticated and sophisticated. Dixie Goswami, a doctoral candidate at Rutgers and a Professor at Middlesex Community College, is currently examining the writing processes of adults in a community college setting. (1975) I hope that others are also following this important line. We should also, I suggest, interview composers in other modes, such as painters, sculptors, dancers, jazz musicians, even if for some of them verbal language may prove as exotic a medium of communication as paint or clay may be for some of us.

An example: In a 1973 New Yorker profile, the composer and jazz historian Alec Wilder made the following intriguing comment about jazz improvisation:

I wish to God that some neurologists would sit down and figure out

how the improviser's brain works, how he selects, out of hundreds of thousands of possibilities, the notes he does and at the speed he does — how in God's name, his mind works so damned fast! And why, when the notes come out right, they are right . . . . Composing is a slow, arduous, obvious, inch-by-inch process, whereas improvisation is a lightning mystery. In fact, it's the creative mystery of our age. (Wilder, 1973; p. 45)

In my composition research seminar last fall, I recommended that a student interview jazz musicians in light of Wilder's comment and try to ascertain how that 'lightning mystery' might work. Here is an excerpt from one of over 20 interviews conducted: the subject here is one of the best-known American jazz drummers:

Interviewer: Okay, so, the first thing I'd like to ask you, that I'd like you to do is complete a sentence for me, okay? I'll give you the beginning; you finish it off.

Drummer: Right.

Interviewer: . . . . 'Jazz improvisation is . . . . . ' That's it. . . .

Drummer: Yeah, 'provisation is . . . oh, right, let's see, it's a, rhythmically — and melodically, you know, in reference to the time. I'm a drummer, so you know . . . you gotta keep the melody in it going through it, you know?

Interviewer: Ah, not exactly.

Drummer: Well, you *hear* it — dig it, man; you don't, uh, you got all them dumb laymen all lost, you know? . . .

Interviewer: Uh, huh. . . . Now, just for argument's sake, think of an improvised solo as a musical problem to be solved. All right, respond — tell me what you think about this statement: 'A jazz musician has, I believe, a "trained sensibility" — a kind of intimacy with music, which allows him to size up the nature of the problem very, very rapidly. . . .'

Drummer: I agree. No, really, yeah. . . 'cause you know the pattern — you learn the pattern — and it's important, you know? At any time, any given time — listen and getting what, with whoever you're playing with, what they're playing — you gotta be ready, you know for diff — for anything, different things. . . 'cause if you can't keep it together, you know, well, hell, they ain't gonna call back you know? (Cooper, 1974)

So much for pursuing that particular line of inquiry.

What other kinds of research can contribute to our understanding of the writing process? To me, the most exciting current theorizing has its roots in biology and concerns that most primal fount of information — the brain and its functions. There are two especially generative approaches here: the first concerns the way children — that is, all of us — progress through describable and regular stages of development to cognitive maturity. This field of course is developmental psychology, with undoubtedly the most important student of the journey Jean Piaget (e.g.,

1971), although others like Vygotsky (1962) and Bruner (e.g., 1971) have also made major contributions. Elsewhere I have suggested the values of viewing writing from the vantages Piaget, Bruner, and Vygotsky provide. (Emig, 1974)

The second source of information is what we can learn from the brain when it is literally fragmented or 'shattered' by an accident or by a trauma that leads to aphasia in one of its many forms. It is the second I will discuss here. What can the study of damaged brains contribute to a knowledge of the writing process? It is of course impossible to set forth in a brief paper the complexity of connections and relations within the brain that may pertain to the writing process. But let me describe current generalizations about the brain and its functions; then speculate, too briefly, about some of their implications for building a theory of the writing process. With this stress we are not leaving case-study as a methodology, by the way. Rather, we are moving into one of the realms in which it is most delicately and skillfully deployed.

If a defense or rationale is required for tapping this source of data, it is that attempting to ascertain the whole from the fragmented, the normal from the aberrant, the functional from the dysfunctional is one of our oldest research plays. One thinks here of Freud and the rich subsequent inquiries of psychoanalysis, or of research in reading that at least for the first third of its history in this century proceeded from this assumption.

A lucid, if somewhat oversimplified, description of the physiology of the brain appears in Robert Ornstein's readable *The Psychology of Consciousness* (1972):

The cerebral cortex of the brain is divided into two hemispheres, joined by a large bundle of interconnecting fibers called the 'corpus callosum.' The left side of the body is mainly controlled by the right side of the cortex, and the right side of the body by the left side of the cortex. When we speak of *left* in ordinary speech, we are referring to that side of the body, and to the *right* hemisphere of the brain. Both the structure and the function of these two 'half-brains' in some part underlie the two modes of consciousness which simultaneously coexist within each one of us. Although each hemisphere shares the potential for many functions, and both sides participate in most activities, in the normal person the two hemispheres tend to specialize. The left hemisphere (connected to the right side of the body) is predominantly involved with analytic, logical thinking, especially in verbal and mathematical functions. Its mode of operation is primarily linear. This hemisphere seems to process information sequentially. This mode of operation of necessity must underlie logical thought, since logic depends on sequence and order. Language and mathematics, both left-hemisphere activities, also depend predominantly on linear time.

If the left hemisphere is specialized for analysis, the right hemisphere (again, remember, connected to the left side of the body) seems specialized for holistic mentation. Its language ability is quite limited . . . This hemisphere is primarily responsible for our orienta-

tion in space, artistic endeavor, crafts, body image, recognition of faces. It processes information more diffusely than does the left hemisphere, and its responsibilities demand a ready integration of many inputs at once. If the left hemisphere can be termed predominantly analytic and sequential in its operation, then the right hemisphere is more holistic and relational, and more simultaneous in its mode of operation. (p. 51-53)

What does this delineation of the brain and its functions have to do with writing? It provides a framework for discussing what happens to writing when the brain is subjected to a trauma and loses certain of its functions. The reason that brain damage or the brain-damaged can contribute to our understanding of the writing process is that, examining such damage, we can begin to infer, quite explicitly and quite terribly, what are the key variables in the process, what elements and functions are related or allied to what others, and which are isolated or discrete.

In *The Shattered Mind* (1975), his extraordinary and thorough review of the literature, Howard Gardner notes in two contexts that the single most common symptom in aphasia, no matter the species, is the loss of the ability to write:

theoretically, a patient who is clearly aphasic and yet can write normally is at least conceivable: to the best of my knowledge, however, no convincing report of such a case exists. . . (p. 119)

And

Entailing linguistic, motor, and visual competence [elsewhere the series Gardner gives is 'perceptual, motor, linguistic, cognitive'], the capacity to organize thoughts logically while simultaneously coordinating the mechanical aspects of the graphic act, writing is more likely to be impaired than other linguistic skills, irrespective of the site of the injury. (p. 294)

Note the phrase 'irrespective of the site of the injury.' Despite the classical presentation of the left hemisphere as the dominant one for linguistic functioning, an examination of the role of the right hemisphere makes clear that it too deals with functions assuredly requisite to writing. Housed in this sphere, for example, is our ability to comprehend and to make metaphor. And what poet — indeed, what writer? — would proceed with that function or ability impaired? Indeed, as Gardner notes, there are 'no actual recorded cases of continued distinction in creative writers suffering significant right-hemisphere disease.' (p. 295)<sup>2</sup>

(An aside that is not truly an aside: the division of writing into two basic modes, a mitosis many of us have made and many others have found abstruse and academic, may literally, organically, have as its origin the division of the brain into two spheres.)

In the second quotation above, Gardner states that the competencies required in writing are the motor, the visual, and the linguistic. Is,

however, motor competence of the same order of importance as visual or linguistic competence? That there is a motoric factor in the writing process may possibly prove to be a trivial and misleading matter. If students and victims of aphasia cannot physically write, for reasons ranging from immaturity of small muscle movement to loss of small muscle control, can certain technologies not be introduced as surrogates for the writing hand? One can imagine here experiments with tape-recorders, electric and voice-actualizing typewriters — even, to grow anachronistic — with human scribes.

Having said this, I must acknowledge statements some major writers have made about the importance of the literal act of writing, particularly Hemingway's comment after he once injured his hand that he feared he would have to give up writing, so crucial to him was the manuality of the task.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, we also know that Henry James and others dictated their novels to a secretary.

The point here may well be that the writing process is powerfully, perhaps even uniquely, multi-modal, involving simultaneously sight, sound, and touch in an intricate, mutually dependent and reinforcing cycle and that the loss of one sense-modality represents, at least for some, an almost fatal impairment of the total process. Pursuing the research possibilities contained within this sentence could represent a lifetime of inquiry.

A somewhat related matter: one characteristic of the written word, in contrast to the spoken word — is its availability for re-scanning and re-reading. Gardner cites cases — indeed, there seems to be a species of aphasia — where brain-damaged patients can write, but not read. Gardner does not report the kind of writing that emerges when the patient is thus impaired; but one wonders how meaningful or complex such discourse can possibly be. Also, if I read the case-studies in Gardner accurately, there are not instances of patients who *continue for any length of time* to write coherently who cannot read what they write. To give yourself a sense of what such a situation would be like, imagine writing on a scroll that revolved your words from your sight or imagine writing with the curtain of a reading pacer immediately covering what you had just written. The central research question here, I think, is 'How necessary is reading to the process of writing?' More specifically, 'Without the opportunity to re-read, does the writer continue to revise? And if so, what form does revising take?'

Brain damage also affects remembering and, it turns out, equally crucially forgetting: it makes somewhat clearer the role of memory in the writing process. The first statement to make is self-evident. All writing requires that we possess both short-term and long-term memory: short-term so that we can remember what we are writing about and what we have just written; long-term so that we can draw upon our pool of ex-

perience. Amnesia, in any degree, it seems, is not propitious for the writing process.

But it also seems to be the case that it is not propitious to be unable to forget, since writing entails focussing upon some details and forgetting or abandoning others. In his extraordinary case-study *Memoirs of a Mnemonist*, the Russian psychologist A.R. Luria presents the astonishing story of S. S had a strange problem: he could forget nothing from the wallpaper next to his crib when he was an infant to, seemingly, every face he had ever seen. Perhaps even more exhausting and intrusive, almost every word he heard set off a wild, unquenchable stream of associations. If S were asked to solve a story problem involving the addition of seven mushrooms and seven mushrooms, he could never solve the problem because he first had to recall every detail of a scene in the woods where, ostensibly, a man and his wife were collecting mushrooms. Discussing S, Gardner notes, in a telling phrase, "[Our cognitive powers involve] the ability to organize, classify, evaluate and dismiss." (p. 212)

Any adequate theory of the writing process, then, must somehow account for the role of remembering, and forgetting.

'Do these known and new sources provide the foundation for a theory of the writing process?' Responding to this last question from the catalog that began this paper requires, I think, having a theory about theory. In *The Theory of Personality* (1955), the psychologist George Kelly provides such a theory, helpful to those of us dealing with the process or writing. Kelly's initial definition of a theory is straightforward enough: 'A theory may be considered as a way of binding together a multitude of facts so that one may comprehend them all at once.'

But a good theory also performs more active functions. It provides an explicit framework within which certain deductions may be made and future events anticipated. It also provides a general framework within which certain facts may be held in place, pending one's induction of some specific principle among them. In both senses the theory acts as a tool for the man who actively seeks to anticipate the future and to explore its possibilities. (p. 24)

The problem is that we do not yet have facts that are to be bound together or held in place. We do not yet know, for example, such bedrock matters as who writes how, and the possible correlations between given processes and given products. Are there universals in the writing process — components that are shared, no matter the mode consciously or unconsciously selected?

Our inquiries into the writing process are still in their morning. If we pursue the insights available to us through a growing range of sources, however, we may soon have those facts required for building a theory of the writing process.

## NOTES

1. I wish to thank Professor Dixie Goswami of Middlesex Community College, Edison, New Jersey, for recommending the Gardner study to me. Reading this current review of the research on aphasia brought to memory an experience fourteen years ago, in which patients at the Boston Veterans Administration Hospital volunteered to demonstrate their disabilities to Dr. Eric Lenneberg's Harvard class on the psychology of language. Presenting selves they knew to be impaired to our scrutiny I regard as the most moving instance I know of contributing to scientific understanding.
2. It is important to set Gardner's comment within its full sentence: "Although I know of no actual recorded cases of continued distinction in creative writers suffering significant right-hemisphere disease, I have encountered a number of patients whose writing performance seems to have remained at or near their pre-morbid level of skill." Gardner, on p. 369, notes that Macdonald Critchley also reports universal impairment in this group from aphasia; but the report, according to Gardner, is 'regrettably undocumented.'
3. I thought this appeared in the interview Hemingway gave to *The Paris Review*, but the comment must occur in another context.

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## The Child, the Writing Process, and the Role of the Professional

by

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I was startled by the sound of machine gun fire from the rear. Quickly I turned . . . and noted that seven-year-old Michael was writing again. He would gaze at his drawing of warfare between Germans and Americans at the top of his paper, reach up and crayon in a red explosion for emphasis, and with shooting noises escaping from his lips return to the written description of his private war. Although classified as a reader at the pre-primer level, Michael struggled with an average of three unassigned writings per day, yet apparently enjoyed the full process of writing.

Every day hundreds of thousands of Michaels wrestle, smile, laugh, curse and weep over their writings. Some, pondering new schemes for delightful fantasies, are in a constant state of rehearsal for writing. Others are repelled at the thought of writing one word because it means five to six redrafts of the spelling of a single word. Miracles of creation are occurring all around us, with some even contained in such short sentences as, "I gut a bik," or "My cat did." These sentences may hardly sound creative, yet on an individual basis, if the full context of developmental factors were understood, we would be impressed with these "simple" products. These miracles of process are occurring within our arm's reach from day to day.

Tragically these miracles within the process of writing escape us. For eighteen years I had wandered through hundreds of classrooms observing children and young people in the process of writing. These visits, however, only involved short observations of a child's word struggle, the rewriting of a phrase, or the answering of their questions about topics for writing. For this reason my concept of the writing process was only made up of vague memories of collective vignettes about many Michaels.

Through the years I have bounced from one philosophy of teaching writing to another, none of which viewed writing as a process or accommodated for the child's learning strategies or sequences of development. At first I refrained from participating in any phase of the writing process. I decided to "teach" at the point of the finished product through a meticulous accounting of all errors. I embraced the domino theory of writing which considered the missing of one misspelling, grammatical error, or misplaced word as the beginning of the downfall of the young writer.

In time I began to have doubts about the success of my Salem witch

hunt and changed from a vigilant conservatism to a permissive liberalism. It seemed that my proper role as a professional began before the child started to write. My task was now to "release" the child to write. Indeed, all that might be needed was the right "story starter" or the proper writing atmosphere. My oversimplification of both the writing process and the ranges of development in children led to a lottery philosophy that was suggestive of gimmickry and quick solutions. I was sure there was a magic creativity button existing within each child that begged for some ingenious teacher to come along and give it a push.

Both of these coercive and permissive approaches were contemptuous of children. In each case the teacher assumed a god-like role. In the coercive approach the teacher was kindly or reprimanding depending on the child's product. In the permissive approach the child was dependent on the teacher's preordained structure for his stimulation.

Through my ineffectual attempts to assist the writing of children with the beetle-browed look of a city editor, or the encouraging nods of a beneficent monk, I began to hope that research might offer some new avenue leading to an understanding of children and the writing process. A review of research did not add hope or precision to my concept of the writing process. Most studies in writing research dealt with broad investigations involving interventions with new materials, methodologies, or analyses of writing products. Up to the time of my own research survey just three studies involved a connection with the actual process of writing. Sawkins (1970) asked children to recount their writing habits and experiences after completing writing. Only Emig (1971) and Holstein (1970) were actually present when students were in the process of composing. Holstein's primary focus was on the use of metaphor rather than process, although a review of her data reveals a strong portrayal of variant composing habits. Emig's study with twelfth grade students was the most thorough investigation into the composing processes of young writers. Indeed, her study involving the actual viewing and recording of the composing of individuals dispelled many of the popular notions about how young writers arrived at their final products.

For too long we have purported to understand child behaviors in writing without an extensive bank of observations based on children actually engaged in the writing process. In the field of child development, for example, it would be unthinkable to attempt to draw conclusions about the nature of parallel play without at least first observing children in the process of play. However, statements continue to be made about the nature of the writing process by people who have never carefully observed children in the act of writing.

For years I had made pronouncements about children and the writing process, but not once had I observed a child's involvement in the writing process for more than a three to five minute period. After spending a year

observing a small group of children engaged in classroom writing and other related activities I feel better equipped to discuss the writing process of children and the teacher's role in this process.

### *Two Types of Writers: Reactive and Reflective*

In the year's study of the writing processes of seven-year-old children, two distinctive types of writers emerge. These two types of writers are identified as a result of examining the various phases of the writing process in relation to certain developmental factors. The two types of writers are classified as *reactive* and *reflective*. The reactive child, for example, often used erratic problem solving strategies, needed time and practice to rehearse what he would write, spoke out loud as he wrote and proofread only at the word unit level. The reflective writer, on the other hand, needed little rehearsal before writing, wrote rapidly and silently, and proofread in broader written units. The reactive writer is most often a boy and the reflective writer is most often a girl. The reactive and reflective writers, however, are each composite profiles of a general type of child. Identification of either the reactive or the reflective writer is not dependent on the observation of a single behavioral trait. Rather, the characteristics exist in varying degrees in all children, and can emerge under different types of writing conditions, but they gain greater visibility when viewed at the extreme high and low ends of a developmental continuum. These types of writers are specifically mentioned since they have great import for the discussion about the role of the professional.

Two prototypes of the reactive and reflective writer will be described to provide a sense of the components of the writing process and the developmental variables involved. This approach provides a suitable backdrop for understanding significant points for teacher participation. The two prototypes, John, the reactive writer, and Laura, the reflective writer, are described within each of the three phases identified as important divisions of the writing process. These phases are prewriting, composing, and postwriting.

### *Three Phases of the Writing Process: Prewriting, Composing and Postwriting*

*Prewriting.* The prewriting phase immediately precedes the writing of the child. Within this phase it is possible to witness the rehearsal factor leading to the child's actual writing.

John usually rehearsed his writing through drawing. The drawing provided a means to find out what content might be contained in his writing. For example, if John were queried before drawing, "What will you be writing about when you finish drawing?" he would respond, "I don't know. I haven't drawn the picture yet."

As John drew, he made sound effects to simulate the appropriate ac-

tion contained in the drawing. The order of drawing was in an action-reaction sequence. For example, he would first draw a gun and then the plane the gun was intended to shoot. He would then draw another coupled action on the other side of the paper that was unrelated to the first, yet generally related to the overall theme, war.

Laura apparently needed a less visible means of rehearsing for writing. For example, when Laura first picked up her paper for writing, little more than a ten second delay elapsed before she was observed writing words on the paper. If queried before writing about the content, Laura would reply with a well-developed story which would subsequently emerge word-for-word in the composing phase. How was it possible for Laura to suddenly compose with no apparent prewriting phase in operation? It is hypothesized that this type of child is in a constant state of rehearsal through daydreaming, story telling, reading, or listening to the stories of others.

*Composing.* The composing phase begins and ends with the actual writing of the message. Examples of factors observed in this phase are spelling, use of resources, the use of oral language which accompanies writing, pupil interactions with each other, proof readings, rereadings, interruptions, erasures and teacher participation.

It appeared necessary for John to vocalize before writing words on his paper. If you were seated next to John's desk when he wrote you would hear him utter the exact words that would subsequently be written on paper. He would often struggle with three or four different spelling versions of the same word, reread to find his place, announce the next word, and write on. John wrote slowly, at approximately one and a half words per minute. It was not unusual for John to glance up at his drawing at the top of the paper for ideas, or should an area of high affect occur in the writing not contained in the drawing, he would draw in the missing event. Proofreading occurred almost exclusively at the word unit level. By the end of the year an occasional word within the phase might be changed, but this was the extent of the adjustment.

When John was involved in unassigned writing (writing not required by the teacher) the content of his drawing and written message was filled with action. His characterizations were often extensions of his own desires to be a hockey player, pilot, bulldozer operator, or painter. Most of his writings were written in third person, excluded females, and involved a broad territorial range.

Laura wrote rapidly (fourteen words per minute) and silently. She would occasionally adjust a word at the phrase level, and gave no evidence of struggle with word selection or spelling.

Laura's unassigned writings were filled with fantasy about deeds of "long ago." "Once upon a time" was a familiar story beginning. Her characters were well developed and reflected on their feelings about

events. If requested, she was capable of stating five to six sentences before they were written on the paper.

*Postwriting.* This phase refers to all behaviors following the actual completion of the child's first composing. Examples of these behaviors are product disposition, the child's solicitation of approval from others, proofreading, and contemplation of the finished product.

#### *The Child's Evaluation of His Own Writing on His Own Criteria*

John was asked, "What do you think a good writer needs to be able to do in order to write well?" John's response was, "You have to space your letters well, draw good, be neat, and spell all the words right." With the exception of drawing, John's chief concern was with the errors of writing. Other children in the study also stated that their points of struggle in writing were the desirable qualities needed in the good writer. In short, if a child could not spell, he felt the good writer needed to be able to spell well.

Laura's response to the "good writer" question was more elaborate and reflective. She stressed the need for prethinking and having a good beginning and ending to the story. She also thought the good writer should use quotation marks, periods, capitals and have an understanding of where a sentence begins and ends. Finally, she stressed, "When you write about people you ought to tell how they feel."

Both the reflective and reactive writers were asked to evaluate their own papers which were periodically collected in writing folders. John, when asked about his reasons for choosing his best paper would often reply, "I liked the picture. This was about hockey and hockey is my favorite sport." Laura, on the other hand, would respond, "it was good because it was long, and it had funny people in it, and it was about an unusual subject." Reactive persons tend to use simple, affective reasons whereas reflective writers are more elaborative in their judgments.

#### *The Teacher's Effect on the Environment and on Student Attitudes*

A paradigm for the writing process has been developed and described above as a three phase operation (prewriting, composing, and postwriting) with two differing writers' *modus operandi* in each phase. This model can be useful to the teacher who is striving to make his role in the writing process of his students as effective and productive as possible. The following suggestions are based on the model; they relate to the three phases and they take into account the fact that in each phase there are two very different kinds of writer behaviors which must be accommodated.

*Teacher as a Model.* First the teacher should assess his own writing habits. The teacher who enjoys writing poetry, a personal journal, stories, or even carefully planned reports will tend to foster the desire to write in his students, and he will better understand the writing problems of his student. Furthermore, the teacher who writes can serve as a model for his class. Young students, or children of any age, see teachers and other adults

engaged in speaking and reading, but they rarely observe adults in the act of writing. The teacher who seeks to enhance his students' propensity to write might ask himself: "How can I best begin to enjoy writing or continue to enjoy writing? How can my participation in the classroom serve as a model for writing to my students?"

*Classroom Management.* Following reflection on his own writing habits, a professional can begin to review the typical organization, direction, and management of classroom activities. A review of the two cases of John and Laura reminds us that writing is a highly individual act. Although it is possible to herd children into the position of having to write at the same time, the urge and need to write in a diversified environment can come at many points during a school day. Children's writing time and pace also need accommodation. Other questions for reflection are the following: "Can children write for varying lengths of time, especially where greater time is needed in the prewriting phase through drawing, discussion and other means of rehearsal? Is it possible for children to write throughout the day on a range of personal interests?"

*Psychological and Physical Environment.* Does the psychological environment in the classroom stimulate children to write freely when they want and about what they want? Does the physical environment stimulate ideas and suggest topics about which children may choose to write?

An example of a stimulating environment was found in Laura's classroom. A high premium was placed on oral as well as written excellence. If interesting or stimulating phrases were stated by children, the teacher would record these sayings on a board entitled, "Class Quotes." The name of the author would be placed beneath the quote.

Story telling, puppetry, reading and performing plays, and the opportunity to look at and read a large collection of library books provided imaginative and fanciful ideas and topics for writing. Building blocks, plants, animals, and science materials were among the concrete materials present which provided ideas, experiences, and topics for writing. In short, the environment stimulated language and the language produced was highly valued.

*Value Placed on the Written Product.* Another developmental trait needing scrutiny is permanence. Permanence is usually discussed within a perceptual context where a child recognizes the same object in different situations. This permanence is developed through the child's continued interaction with the object over a long period of time.

What attitude is a child likely to develop toward writing when his written products are quickly removed from sight, placed in a desk drawer, sent home the same day, or simply buried in sheafs of dittoed exercises in arithmetic, social studies, etc.? Such treatment of children's written products certainly does not foster the idea in children that their writing is permanent and unique; nor does such treatment enable children to

perceive progress in the ability to write over time.

A standard of excellence can be developed in each child through collections of his best work. Once the best writing has been determined for the individual child, he may have a personally bound book in which his writing is pasted or placed in a permanent collection of class writings. Other teachers have used bound journals in which the child writes on one page and the teacher responds on the opposite. With provisions for collecting writing the child may begin to sense his growth as a writer. He finds that he can read last month's paper again and again, thus taking advantage of the "instant replay" potential contained in print. Finally he may say, "Yes, these papers today are much better than the ones I wrote last October."

### *Teacher Involvement in the Writing Process of Students*

Beyond providing an atmosphere conducive to writing, the teacher should be involved in all three phases of the writing process as they are engaged in by individual students. Since opportunities are provided for children to write throughout the day, the teacher must make the rounds at different hours. One can not expect to have contact with each child every time he writes, but over the course of a week or a month considerable interaction between the teacher and each child is possible while the child is actually engaged in the process of writing.

When making rounds the professional serves a wide range of functions, depending on the phase the child is in. Children's awareness is so "now" oriented that the teacher can only provide services related to the stage where he finds the child at the time of contact. This is particularly true of the reactive writer whose awarenesses are based on moment to moment activity. Basically the professional should attempt to stimulate, extend, observe and diagnose the activity of the child. Through stimulation it is hoped that children will find new reasons for writing and become aware of new audiences to write for. Through questions and observation the professional seeks to find out the stage and *modus operandi* of the writer, in order to know best how to be a competent consultant. What follows are examples of both the place and type of question that can be asked of the student actively engaged in writing.

*Prewriting.* Tell me about your picture, Bill. What are you going to be writing about when you finish? I notice you have some people swimming away from the sharks? Tell me about them.

*Composing.* What is going to happen next in your story? I notice that you are writing about a fashion show. What do you think are some words everyone ought to know to understand more about fashion? (child dictates, teacher writes the words). Would you like to use these words? Which sentence do you like best up to now? Which word was the most difficult to write? That seems to be a difficult word. Tell me all the places

you can go to find out how to spell it. How is your story going to end? Do you think you know yet?

*Postwriting.* Would you read this out loud? Is there anything you would like to change now? Which part do you like best? Do you think this is one of your best? Why? Why not?

#### *Teacher Involvement After the Process Is Complete*

The final stage of teacher activity occurs when the child has completed all three phases of the writing process. Most of this activity occurs in the individual conference between child and teacher every five to six days. During the conference the child evaluates his work by selecting his own best papers. The teacher asks for the child's rationale with the intention of developing the child's ability to criticize his own writing. The task of the professional is to ask questions in such a way the child will be able to discover standards for himself. Examples of such questions are the following:

You say that this paper about "horses" is your best and this one about "hockey" is not quite as good. Why do you feel the "hockey" paper is not as good? I agree. This paper about "horses" is excellent. Would you like to have it put in the class collection? (a permanently bound collection of class writings). O.K., but I think there are some things needing changing to make it your very best. Where do you think you might begin?

You are making a fine point in this first sentence. Let's look at the next sentence. Read it out loud. Is that about the same subject in your first sentence?

Perreault has just scored a goal. How do you think he felt when he scored? (Child dictates and teacher writes.) Do you think others would like to know about how he felt? Would you like to use these words you have just dictated to me?

#### *Summary*

The teacher plays a vital role in the writing process of his students over a broad continuum of time. The teacher must evaluate a) his own writing activity and its effect on his students as an inspiration to write and as a model for writing, b) his management practices to determine whether there is time and space provided so that each child can write what he wants when he wants, c) the physical and psychological environment of his classroom to determine whether there is high value placed on good oral and written expression and whether there are materials present to encourage various forms of language expression and stimulate ideas, and d) the value placed on written products to determine whether the "hidden curriculum" is teaching children to view their written products as permanent works where growth can be seen, or to view their written products as so much extra litter.

As children become involved in the three phases of the writing process, the professional seeks through observation and intervention to stimulate writing, extend it, as well as to diagnose at which developmental level the child may be functioning. Finally, a teacher's task in the facilitation of good writing is carried out in the writing conference where children are aided in both skills and their growing sense of excellence in communication.

This review of children, the writing process and the role of the teaching professional is concluded with a plea for greater involvement with young children. It is entirely possible to read about children, review research and textbooks about writing, "teach" them, yet still be completely unaware of their processes of learning and writing. Unless we actually structure our environments to free ourselves for effective observation and participation in all phases of the writing process we are doomed to repeat the same teaching mistakes again and again. If we shield ourselves from a full involvement with students we lose out on a vital source of energy so needed in teaching in our time. There is something energizing about the discovery of a child's way of learning, or in sharing in the joy and confidence resulting from his growing sense of competence as a writer. It is this discovery that dissipates our fatigue and renews our vitality.

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## Responding to Student Writing

by

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### *Introduction: The Writing Process*

To write is to transcribe a composition, a verbal discourse, on some topic to some audience for some purpose. Writing is an expressive, creative verbal act, reflecting experience and language development, and requiring the writer to project an image of himself, a persona. The writer's notion of persona, reader, and purpose guide the composing process, determining choices about tone, arrangement, sequence, syntax, and diction.

A particular piece of writing does not get itself transcribed as water comes from a faucet, spurting suddenly, flowing smoothly, and then ceasing abruptly. A piece has a gestation or pre-writing period, which may vary in length from a few minutes to several years. During transcription the piece finds shape and direction, as the writer anticipates what comes next and continuously reviews what has already been transcribed. No piece is predictable at the outset. Finally, the piece can be edited, revised, or reformulated, merely tinkered with or wholly redone. This complex, expressive, unpredictable, malleable, difficult activity is what we call the writing process.

Now I am not talking only about what adult professional writers do. What I have just said describes the writing process of a fourth grader as well as a twelfth grader, of a dull seventh grader as well as a bright seventh grader, of a kid whose father drives a garbage truck as well as a kid whose father is a Ph.D., of a speaker of standard English as well as a speaker of a Chicano or Black dialect of English, of an unhappy, aggressive eighth grader who dislikes schools and teachers and who writes only reluctantly and then only briefly as well as professionals like Joyce Carol Oates or John Updike. I most emphatically do not want to leave anybody out. Writers all have the same composing problems.

A young student is a writer as soon as he can form letters and spell phonically, so that his transcription can be decoded, though perhaps with some difficulty, by an adult reader. Notice that I have not mentioned correct spelling, correct use of punctuation or capital letters, or form and neatness. Anyone who has read e. e. cummings or the cockroach Archy or much recent concrete poetry knows that such matters are not a requirement for a written verbal communication. Even the punctuation exercises some teachers give support my point: students could not punctuate a

prose passage from which all the punctuation had been removed unless they understood it first as a written communication. But now let me be quick to add that I am very concerned about spelling and punctuation and handwriting. Part of the writing teacher's task is to help students with those problems, but those problems are only a small, relatively trivial part of the task, I would argue. The writing teacher's main task is to provide help with the writing process, as I have described it above. To do that the teacher will have to be concerned mainly with the *essence* of compositions, rather than the *accidents* of transcriptions, to use Janet Emig's terms. Unfortunately, just as we're learning what to do about the essences, some people are using the talk about basic skills to revive misplaced concern with the accidents; but surely the *most* basic of all the writing skills are matters of persona, audience, and purpose and the word and sentence adjustments the writer makes as he tries to speak with a certain voice to a special audience on a particular topic.

### *Classroom Writing Instruction*

Classroom writing instruction must nourish the writing process, must foster growth in writing ability in many modes for many audiences, must concern itself mainly with essences, with essential matters. That focus requires us, I think, to put away the grammar and composition books and the fill-in-the-blank exercises, to adopt a notion of correctness as being a matter of appropriateness in the full communication context of the written piece, and to give up systematic whole-class instruction on parts of speech, sentence diagrams, and usage rules. Not to give up standards or high expectations, however — students should write more than they do and better than they do. Nor to give up instruction in standard usage and syntactic fluency, but rather to place it in a different context. And not to give up concern with practical writing. I can think up as many reasons as the next teacher why every student leaving high school should write good business letters, expository essays, and research papers.

I think we have learned now that classroom writing instruction in order to nourish the writing process, must be devoted largely to two kinds of activities: (1) getting ready to write the next piece, what some call pre-writing activities, and (2) responding in a variety of ways to writing students produce, responding to essential matters, and responding in a way that keeps the flow coming, that keeps expressiveness and willingness high. These two kinds of activities make a closed circle in practice, but for purposes of thinking about instruction I believe we can usefully separate them. This paper is about the second kind of activity, responding to student writing.

Now if this does not so far sound too outrageous — certainly I am not the first to say any of it — and if you are still with me, let us try to answer this question: How does the writing teacher arrange for each student to get

*immediate, insightful, supportive response* to each piece he produces? Having asked it that way, I may seem to have made it unanswerable. But let us be true to the composing process and to writer's needs for a moment in order to see what we can work out. Let us see how *close* we can get to an answer to what all of us who teach writing at any grade level know to be the right question, rightly asked.

### *Immediate Response to Writing*

*How to get immediate response*, the same day the piece is written in class or the very first time the piece is brought to class. I know of only two ways: (1) the teacher talks to students one at a time about their papers, getting to as many students as possible within a class period; and (2) students read each other's papers in pairs or small groups.

I think a good argument can be made, given the personal and expressive nature of every writing task, for responding *only* personally and conversationally to the student writer about a piece he has produced, with any marks or corrections or comments put on the paper while the conversation is going on about the piece. Fast-paced, well-focused interviews are possible every five or six minutes if the pieces are not too long. If some class meetings — perhaps two or three a week — are organized as writing workshops, the teacher can spend a good part of the time talking to individual students about their writing. Every student deserves at least an occasional conversation with his teacher about his writing. The conversations can be impromptu as the teacher moves around the class while students are writing, or they can be planned, with students coming up to the teacher's desk one at a time.

A form of next-day response is to select two or three pieces of writing produced on one day and duplicate or project the pieces for teacher-led discussion the next day. This response is personal only for the two or three students whose pieces happen to be selected, but it is also of some use to all students, particularly if they are all working on the same problem, a certain kind of response to a work of fiction read in common, say, or if they are all writing in the same mode, maybe autobiography. The talk about the piece can range widely, but it should be concerned mainly with essential matters of voice, audience, purpose, and content and with the word and sentence choices the student has made in that context. Matters of correctness appropriate to that context can be taken up, of course, and grammatical terms and usage rules can be introduced, but informally, incidentally, without interrupting instruction in the essentials of writing. We know from research that this incidental approach to correctness is more effective than whole-class rule-learning and isolated drill exercises (see the concise review of this research in Mellon, 1969).

Arranging immediate response must eventually involve the students, simply because of the time and numbers constraints all teachers face. In

pairs students can exchange pieces and then talk in a general way about the pieces: they can proofread for spelling, punctuation, and usage errors; they can help each other revise and reformulate just prior to display or publication; or they can do a directed responding exercise such as the *pointing* and *summarizing* exercises in Peter Elbow's book *Writing Without Teachers*. In groups of four or five students can circulate their papers and write comments on them or talk about them. In pairs or groups students can read their papers aloud. In a variety of ways, then, pairs and groups can provide immediate response in large quantities. The response will never be as good as you could give, but it will be of some help to the writer. Students do get better at it, mainly as you model for them what can be said about a piece of writing.

Many classes can be greatly helped with small group work if they are given simple training exercises for groups, exercises designed mainly to help them listen more carefully and to draw each other out, to understand each other, without clowning and arguing. Several collections of these exercises are available (Stanford and Stanford, 1969; Sax and Hollander, 1972).

#### *Supportive Response to Writing*

*How to give supportive response*, response that shows the student what he has done, how well he has achieved his purpose and got through to his audience, and yet does not discourage him from revising or trying again. I have only general advice on this point and nothing really new. In the end writing is hard, lonely work, a demanding, sometimes frustrating activity which needs support and encouragement. We can be supportive in the classroom if we treat error as a chance to improve, not as an occasion for punishment. If we do not grade individual pieces but rather grade on the basis of demonstrated growth or improvement over time (see Cooper, 1975 for a growth measurement and grading scheme) we can more easily use error as a chance to instruct rather than a chance to penalize.

Personal response always seems more supportive than impersonal, distanced written comments or corrections. From time to time there can be a moratorium on negative comments from the teacher and students. Negative comments, criticisms, and suggestions for correction and revision can always be balanced with encouraging, supportive comments, even for a very weak piece. We can keep the focus on describing what students have done rather than on judging, ranking, or grading. And some of the group training exercises mentioned above can help students become more supportive without embarrassment.

There needs to be a supportive climate in the classroom. The teacher is largely responsible for creating such a climate by conveying to the students the notion that writing is important and that they will be taken seriously as writers. These are not pedagogical pieties. They are requirements for fostering growth in expressive skills like writing.

*Helpful Response to Writing*

*How to arrange for helpful response*, response that teaches specific rhetorical and syntactic strategies and reduces deviance from acceptable forms in written standard English. Here is the major problem, and here is where direct writing instruction enters into the composing process. After the student has produced a piece, what do you say besides AWK or SP or FRAG, and by implication what do you train the students to say when they look at each other's writings? What do you say besides requests for clarity or elaboration or correctness and comments of encouragement as you wander around the room picking up pieces here and there while students are writing? What do you say to the student writer as he sits across the table from you in a conference? What do students say to each other?

Obviously, and most easily, you can say that needs a comma and that needs an "e" on the end and that begins with a capital letter. But beyond that, what do you say? What is it useful to *emphasize* in a piece? I want to discuss three kinds of emphasis, each of them overlapping somewhat, each of them complementary to the other. Let us call the three *rhetorical emphasis*, *intellectual strategies emphasis*, and *syntactic emphasis*.

*Rhetorical emphasis* lets us explore the piece, ask questions of it, beginning with its full rhetorical context. We ask the student (or the class), Who were you writing this for? Who is your reader or readers, your audience? Is this an appropriate topic for those readers? Will they be interested in it?

Then we ask what is the voice (or persona) we hear in this piece? Who is speaking? What *tone* of voice is the speaker using? Tough? Sweet? Stuffy? Is the tone appropriate for the readers this piece is written for?

Then we can ask about the subject or topic. Different kinds of questions would be appropriate for a piece where the writer wants us to see something (a place, an event) and a piece where the writer wants to explain something to us or persuade us. In general these questions lead us into the usual "quality" questions about a piece. Is it detailed, developed, elaborated? Is it specific? Is it coherent? Does it go somewhere? Does it have movement and direction? Is it engaging? There may not be easy agreement about answers to these questions, but having asked them is the important thing. If the answer is "no" to any of the "quality" questions then we come to the crucial matter of prescribing a cure, of giving direction for revision. The cure involves, in part, looking at the intellectual strategies or writing strategies and at the sentence relationships and specific sentence-combining transformations the writer has used.

The procedures I want to describe now can lead to dramatic improvement in a particular piece, but they provide no permanent cure for the writing problems. The growth we are trying to foster will be slow and faltering for the brightest of students under the best of conditions.

*Intellectual strategies emphasis* lets us see what the writer has focused on in the piece and how he has elaborated and qualified that focus. We can examine a piece for focus; for references to change, contrast, physical context, and logical sequence; and for qualification (see Odell and Cooper, 1975, for a full discussion of these and other strategies). Here is a piece written by a girl in Grade 11. Focus (simply the subjects of main clauses) is indicated with italics, references to change with bold face type.

#### An Ideal High School

To me *an ideal high school* is the school of your choice, where you know you can **make friends and be happy**. Besides that. *You know you can get the knowledge* from this ideal school. *It should be you who can be very proud* of your school. In an ideal school *the students and the teachers should be able to get along*. *They should know how to cope* with one another. *The rules* in an ideal school **should be followed** by all the students. *The teachers should not have the first and last word* all the time. Because even though they are teacher's *they can be wrong* too just like a student. *A student should be able to be heard*. I mean. When a student and a teacher get into an argument, *the student* is always wrong. In a ideal school. *All these things* should be taken into consideration. *That* is what I think of an ideal high school.

In examining *focus* we ask two questions: What does the writer focus on? and How often does the writer shift focus? Excluding the last two sentences, which are attempts at summary, we can see quickly that the writer focuses on *people*: eight of the main clause subjects are students (including *you*), students and teachers, or teachers; one clause is about school and another about rules. We can also trace the rather erratic shifts of focus through the paper; we could even plot them, much as we would plot the rhyme scheme in a poem. In discussing this paper we might ask *who* else might be focused on (principal, counselors, certain teachers, coaches, janitors, cafeteria workers) or *what* else might be focused on (curriculum, classes, activities, building, equipment, amenities, comforts).

In examining *references to change* we ask this question: Does the writer refer to change? This paper is mainly concerned with change, or at least change strongly implied, from the way things are to the way they might be. The writer mentions many changes, but she tells us little about them and about how they might be achieved. Right here in our response to the paper we can relate intellectual strategies to rhetorical concerns: we can say that the way this writer handles change reveals her to be a naive speaker, not very helpful to her audience. How might the change strategies in this piece be strengthened? How can we help this writer revise, or how might we have helped her to get ready to write this piece? Let me mention quickly some possibilities. You will think of others.

1. With another student or a group of students this writer could

brainstorm the topic of "ideal school," attempting to list quickly as many changes and ideas for implementing them as the group can generate.

2. We could ask the student to think about change from others' perspectives: cafeteria workers, coach, principal, other students. We would ask the student to interview several of these others about changes they would like to see.

3. We could bring in old pictures of the school or of other schools. We could bring in pictures of new schools, unusual or innovative schools, schools with striking architectural features, schools in other countries.

4. We could ask the student to read descriptions of going to school in America in different historical periods.

In examining *references to contrast* we ask this question: What specific kinds of contrasts occur? In this paper we see two: teachers-students and school now-school as it might be. We could discuss with the student what other kinds of contrasts might be useful in developing the paper -- in saying everything she wants to say on the topic -- and how these contrasts might be fully specified or developed.

In examining *references to physical contrast* we ask this question: what references are there to the actual school itself? In what sort of *place* will teachers and students interact? Since there is no reference in this paper to physical context, we can ask the writer how she might go about filling in that context. Without asking her to give up her focus on *people*, we could encourage her to tell us about the place itself.

In examining *references to logical sequence* we ask this question: what references are there to logical relationship or sequence? (These are usually signalled by words like *because, since, therefore, if . . . then.*) In this paper we find only a *because* and an implied *therefore* before the concluding sentences beginning *In a ideal school*. This topic would seem to lend itself to *if . . . then* relations, and so we could point this out to the writer, perhaps constructing with her a few such sentences (*If students are to follow the rules, then they must help make the rules.*).

In examining *qualifications* we ask this question: Are the statements qualified? This student does little qualifying. She tells us that *all* the rules should be followed by *all* the students. When teachers and students argue, students are *always* wrong. We can point to this aspect of her writing and encourage her to qualify when it seems appropriate.

There is some evidence (Odell, 1974) that students can learn to use consciously all of those intellectual strategies while they write and revise. We can illustrate and teach the strategies from carefully selected pieces of student and professional writing.

*Syntax emphasis* gives us still another way of responding helpfully to students' writing. We know that school-age and college writers all struggle with the important developmental task of using when appropriate greater numbers of sentence-combining transformations. They must learn to

"load the patterns," to say more in each clause. We know, too, that this developmental task can be greatly facilitated by a certain kind of written and oral sentence-combining practice (O'Hare, 1973). The teacher can contribute as well by showing students how they can combine sentences when they revise their writing.

This piece by a girl in Grade 12 will permit me to illustrate how productive syntax emphasis can be:

#### My Best Class

'The best class I was in was my eleventh grade history class. 'I found this class very interesting because the teacher looked upon each student as a young lady or young gentlemen and not as little children. 'We studied out of a textbook, but the class was still interesting because she would relate whatever topic we were on to the current news. 'She was always pleasant and willing to share some news article with the class. 'She would choose a topic which she knew would interest the class. 'The class was always in order. 'As far as I can remember there was never a disturbance in the class. 'She would encourage you to do your homework, but if you didn't do it she would tell you, "You are only hurting yourself and no one else." 'She would never force you to do anything you didn't want to do. 'She was a very good teacher.

Although the mean length of the t-units (independent clauses with all their modifiers [Hunt, 1965]) is only 12.8 words (about that of the average eighth grader), the piece has a reasonable degree of syntactic fluency. Sentences 2, 3, 7, and 8 have adverb clauses. Sentences 1, 3, 5, and 9 have adjective clauses. And yet we notice right away the sentences are not very complex structurally, not very deeply imbedded and lacking absolute phrases, strong medial modification, or noun substitutes in the subject position.

What would we say to the class about it? I can suggest the following possibilities:

1. Begin Sentence 2 with the "because" clause.
2. Begin Sentence 3 with "Even though."
3. Embed the first part of Sentence 4, "She was always pleasant," in Sentence 2 as follows: "... the teacher was always pleasant and always looked upon each student. ..."
4. Then begin Sentence 4 with "Always willing" and attach it to Sentence 5 following.
5. Attach Sentence 7 to Sentence 6 by creating an absolute beginning "there never being."
6. Attach Sentence 9 to the first clause in Sentence 8 by creating another absolute beginning "never forcing."
7. Then make a new sentence of the second clause in Sentence 8 by beginning "If you didn't want to do your homework. ..."

Now with this short piece I don't want to make any grand claims for

the overall effects of these changes. But I have demonstrated how elements can be moved around in a piece of discourse to achieve greater structural variety. I did create a participial phrase sentence opener ("Always willing. . .") and two absolute phrases. And I increased the mean length of t-units to 20.5 words, well beyond that of the average twelfth grader. In such discussions we should always remind students that syntactic decisions are made within the full context of speaker-audience-purpose in a whole piece of discourse: we don't throw in absolute phrases just for the fun of it, but we do need to be able to use them when the rhetorical situation permits or requires them.

### Conclusion

All of these ways of looking at a piece — rhetorical emphasis, intellectual strategies emphasis, syntax emphasis — provide helpful response to young writers. They give us something to do in the classroom besides point out spelling mistakes and misuses of the comma; they direct us to essential matters in writing.

What we know about composing as a process encourages us to use such response-to-writing activities, along with rich and varied pre-writing activities. We would be naive to think we could improve a complex verbal-cognitive-experiential process like composing with pencil-and-paper, fill-in-the-blank exercises or with the pre-teaching of rhetorical and usage rules. Writers are not helped by being told in advance what to avoid. They need to write, to get immediate, supportive, helpful response to what they have written, and then to write again.

We can foster growth in writing in the classroom. We have a good understanding of the composing process and of writing as a skill, and we know how to select activities that enhance rather than subvert that process. The pleasures of seeing our students grow as writers await all of us.

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## Focus: The Process of Seeing and the Process of Writing

by

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A recent story on television evening news opened with a picture of a burning building, smoke billowing from almost every window. The camera next moved close up to show a shattered window, through which one could see the flames inside the building, and then moved back to show firemen climbing a ladder, their bodies silhouetted against the flames. The final camera shot, apparently taken from a helicopter, showed smoke rising hundreds of feet into the air and blocking the view of nearby buildings.

This process of shifting visual focus is a familiar one. We see it not only on the news, but in movies, comic strips, and dramatic programs on TV. At worst, it appears to be merely a clichéd way of creating tension, almost a cheap trick. (A character on a weekly detective program walks hurriedly across a disheveled apartment. We hear pounding on the door, and the camera zooms in to catch the look of apprehension on the character's face. The next image is of two burly, mean-looking men standing outside the apartment door.) At best, however, these shifts in visual focus reflect a basic understanding of the process of perception. When we look at (or listen to or touch or smell or taste) something, we don't just passively take in everything before us. Rather, we select what we perceive. We actively guide our examination of a person, an object, a scene. And one means of guiding this examination is shifting our visual focus — standing back for a panoramic view, moving in for a significant detail that one misses unless standing very close, changing the angle from which we look at something.

There are several ways we can make students aware of this process. One teacher asks students to watch a dramatic TV program (as opposed to a musical or "special" program) and count the number of times the camera shifts focus during a two minute period. Another approach is to ask students to look at a succession of slides in which the camera moves closer and closer to the subject. Or lacking the photographic equipment and know-how to make our own slides, we can have overhead transparencies made from interesting photographs in magazines. By arranging pieces of cardboard on the transparencies so as to block out portions of the picture, we can show students how, literally, to focus their attention on a facial expression, a gesture, a detail of a scene.

To see how this process applies to writing, consider the following passages in which John Steinbeck introduces the reader of *Cannery Row* to one of his characters, Lee Chong. After explaining that Lee Chong's grocery store was "a miracle of supply," if not "a model of neatness," Steinbeck writes:

Lee Chong's station in the grocery was behind the cigar counter. The cash register was then on his left and the bacus on his right. Inside the glass case were the brown cigars, the cigarettes, the Bull Durham . . . while behind him in the racks were the pints, half pints, and quarters of Old Green River, Old Town House, Old Colonel, and the favorite — Old Tennessee, a blended whiskey guaranteed four months old, very cheap and known in the neighborhood as Old Tennis Shoes.

Noting in passing that "some very practical minds had on occasion tried to divert his attention to another part of the store," Steinbeck points out that Lee Chong never left his post at the glass counter.

The top of the glass was his desk. His fat delicate hands rested on the glass, the fingers moving like small restless sausages. A broad golden wedding ring on the middle finger of his left hand was his only jewelry and with it he silently tapped on the rubber change mat . . . Lee's mouth was full and benevolent and the flash of gold when he smiled was rich and warm.

The grammatical subjects in several of the clauses in these passages suggest a succession of visual images, much as though a camera were focusing on parts of Lee Chong's store, then on Lee Chong himself, then on his "desk," his hands, his wedding band, his mouth.

A similar use of grammatical focus may also appear in expository, non-fiction prose; witness this excerpt from a recent account of a cyclone.

On Christmas Eve, Darwin [Australia] had been a thriving city with high-fashion boutiques, supermarkets, emporiums and immaculate suburbs . . . But on Christmas morning, the city resembled Hiroshima after the bomb. Communication with the outside world was gone, and power poles and radio towers were bent flat to the ground. Trains, trucks and cars had been tossed around like plastic toys. The unofficial death toll would reach 49, with an equal number unaccounted for.

As in the *Cannery Row* passages, some changes in grammatical focus (i.e., changes in the grammatical subject of a clause) indicate changes in visual focus — the camera moves from power poles and radio towers to trains, trucks and cars.

This discussion of published writing provides one way we can think about our own students' work. Without arguing that students should be expected to write like John Steinbeck, we can still see that consideration of focus can help us analyze and contribute to students' growth in writing. Two pieces of student writing should help demonstrate this point. The

first, by an eleventh grader, was part of a series of assignments in conveying one's perceptions and reactions to some personal experience. The second, by a twelfth grader, appeared in a high school literary magazine.

#### A Swingin' Dance

Yesterday, my boyfriend and I went to a big dance in Detroit. When we walked into the place, it was real nōsy because everyone was talking and dancing. The dancing area was a lot bigger than most of the other ones I've seen, but the air was filled with smoke that would choke a horse. While looking around, my boyfriend noticed a few of his friends across the room, so we went over there, and introduced them to me. They were the coolest guys! After talking with them, Fabian came up to me and asked me to dance. I just about died! I thought I was going to faint, but I pulled through. He's the most! I thought that my boyfriend was becoming a little jealous because of my reaction to Fabian, so I decided to go a dance or two with him. I danced off and on with him and some other boys the rest of the evening. On the way home I told him that I've never had such a riot at a dance before in my life.

#### Best of Pets

The bright beams peer ahead into the late dusk; I am driving home, Carlisle to Newcastle. Farm houses here along the road are far apart, and as I pass the few distant windows filled with light, I doubt that any inside are aware of my passing.

For a moment I ride the crest of a long hill; then, part way down, the lights play over a dim shape, alien to the rolling landscape. The car rolls to a stop beside it, the still figure of a well-groomed dog. There is little blood; only a wound on the jaw and the angle of the head indicate more or less than sleep. Likely less than an hour ago you left a nearby house, gone for a walk. They won't really be concerned till bedtime when you aren't there to curl up on the rug. Perhaps your owners should be told that you won't be coming home tonight, that you won't come running to the familiar call, or lie under the dinner table, or track mud into the house any more. Perhaps. . . .

But what good would it do? And which house? No, it seems best I go my way. You'll have to wait here till you're found. Until then, for what they know, you're still out, soon to come home, and life will be the same.

The car starts, the beams again clearing a path, and I drive on, now for some reason slower than before, thoughts of my destination, and faint relief for other commitments just not able to block the thought. . . .

Most people with whom I have shared these two passages have a sense that the second is superior. But perhaps our interest will not, for the moment, be well-served by trying to decide which is "better." Both have problems, and each has certain strengths. We might even argue that if the writer of the first piece were trying to capture the persona of an egocentric adolescent girl, the passage is extremely successful. And surely nobody would argue that the grammatical focus on *I* in "A Swingin' Dance"

necessarily makes it poorer writing. But at the same time, it does seem that the second writer is in some ways more sensitive, more perceptive. This writer has observed more and has thought about more kinds of things. A look at the grammatical subjects in the passage shows the writer focusing not just on himself but on his car, the details of his physical surroundings, the object alongside the road, and the owners of the dog.

Occasionally, readers of these two passages try to account for the difference between the two by claiming that the second writer is brighter or simply a "better writer." That sort of distinction may or may not be valid. But it doesn't help us understand how the two pieces of writing differ, nor does it help us show either writer what sort of intellectual or perceptual processes would let the writer revise the original passage or create other sorts of personae in other writings. Attention to the writers' use of grammatical focus, however, is much more helpful. It lets us identify — for our own benefit and for our students' — specific ways a piece of writing can be revised and improved.

This process is not always simple, nor is it a painless way to produce automatically improved writing. Witness comments of students in one ninth grade class. After a discussion of visual and grammatical focus, their teacher had asked them to revise a short description of a woman. Their comments:

- What's she want us to do with these? (the description referred to above)
- A revise dealie — gettin' rid of all the *she's* at the beginning.
- OK. Let's start with her false teeth — yeah — write that down.
- “She has false teeth.”
- No, dummy. We gotta *start* the sentence with “her false teeth.”
- Oh—yeah.
- “Her false teeth.” OK, now what?
- Oh no, if we start with that we gotta add stuff. Like . . . “Her false teeth look funny.”
- Yeah—put that down.
- No, you gotta tell what *funny* means. She'll (the teacher) only ask “What's *funny* mean?”
- I got it. “Her false teeth look yellow.” My grandma's are.
- Yeah, 'cause they're old, like her.
- Put that in.
- Hey. Who's writin'?
- I am. We got “Her false teeth are yellow because they're old.”
- That's good.
- OK, now the stuff on glasses. Oh, God. We're gonna have to add stuff to everything!

Indded, they would have to “add stuff to everything.” But in teaching them how to manipulate focus, their teacher was teaching them a way of guiding this process of adding stuff. And she was also helping them learn one means of engaging themselves in the process of seeing and writing.

## What Children Say about Their Writing

by

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It has been suggested by some reviewers of the research concerned with written composition that there is a need for studies which attempt to discover how a person goes about starting a paper, what questions the writer must answer for himself, what writers think about, what steps they follow, how they get ready for expression, and the like.<sup>1</sup> One approach to answering such questions is to interview writers. In one study we were most interested in talking with elementary grade children about their writing.<sup>2</sup> The children interviewed were a relatively homogeneous group of fifth graders who were determined to be average in regard to general ability. They were asked to write two compositions on assigned topics and were interviewed the day following the writing of the second composition.

An interview guide was developed to insure consistency in topics discussed with the children. What the child thought about before and during writing, what problems were encountered, what factors the child considered important to remember when writing and the degree to which outlines, notes, proofreading and rewriting were used were the major points discussed.

Thirty boys and thirty girls were interviewed. Their compositions were rated by three adult raters using a modified Diederich rating scale in order to assess the quality of the writing.<sup>3</sup> The interviews of the fifteen children who wrote the compositions which received the highest ratings and the fifteen whose compositions received the lowest ratings were compared in regard to both the approaches followed when writing and the quality of the interviews. Attention in these comparisons was also given to sex differences in both the quality of writing and the interviews.

A number of frequency counts were made regarding the factors discussed. These were subjected to statistical analysis to determine whether or not significant differences occurred between good and poor writers in regard to approaches to writing. The results of the statistical analysis indicated that the thirty children in the study performed much the same way when writing whether they produced compositions of high quality or of low quality.

Girls tended to receive higher composition scores than the boys and also tended to respond more completely during the interview. These differences were not statistically significant, however.

The nonstatistical data were also interesting. All of the children responded in some way to questions regarding what they thought about before they wrote and while they were writing. All indicated that their thoughts were primarily concerned with the content of their stories. In addition, several thought about the title or the topic, the characters, and the setting. Two children were interested in creating a mood. A few children gave rather lengthy replies explaining how they went about deciding to write what they did. Only two children of the thirty indicated at the outset that they thought about the "rules for writing a composition."

Some of the children were asked how much of the story they had in mind before beginning to write. Only one had "pretty much all of the story" in mind. The others seemed to write a sentence or two at a time and found that the story seemed to come to them as they wrote. One child said he had the beginning and end in mind before he started but wasn't sure of the middle. Most of the children had no idea of how their story would end before they started to write.

The children were asked about their beginning and ending sentences. Most of them were able to explain what they expected the beginning sentence to do for their story. Some of the poorer writers expressed dissatisfaction with the sentence they used but did not know how to go about improving it even though they sensed, as one boy said, "It should sort of like start off the where it's at." The ending sentence also presented problems for some writers. A few felt the pressure of time and ended abruptly, even though they felt the ending was not satisfactory. Several children indicated they wanted to resolve a problem, present a moral, or as one girl expressed it, "leave a lasting impression."

Another series of questions concerned the thought given to words, sentences and paragraphs. The better writers did give some thought to using suitable words. "When I was describing the gloomy day I wanted to make it sound gloomy" is rather typical of the responses given. Poorer writers were more concerned with spelling words correctly than with using the most suitable words for their stories.

Only about half the children said they gave much thought to their sentences. Those who did, both good and poor writers, thought about the use of sentences to create a mood and about their length and avoidance of "run-on's."

Although some of the children were aware of reasons for paragraphing and did try to use more than one paragraph, the majority were not concerned with this matter. The good writers used the most paragraphs and were able to suggest the greatest number of reasons for using paragraphs.

Most children used neither notes nor outlines as aids to writing. The most frequent use of the paper provided for making notes or an outline was to try out spellings. A few children drew pictures rather than making

notes because they felt this helped them visualize their stories.

In reacting to questions about rewriting or copying over, children who rewrote said they did so most often to make their papers neater. Most of the children said that they proofread and most often gave checking on spelling and capitalization as the reason for doing so.

About the only kind of help children asked for while writing was with spelling. More poor writers than good writers felt they needed this help. Spelling problems also surfaced when children were asked what problems they encountered while writing. Punctuation, capitalization and paragraphing were also mentioned, particularly by the poorer writers. The better writers more often indicated content related problems such as deciding what to put down, deciding which of two situations to use, and forgetting ideas because they think faster than they are able to write.

The concern for the mechanics of writing was evident again when children were asked what things they thought were important to remember when writing a story. Capitalization, punctuation, indentation, paragraphing, length of sentences, completeness of sentences, avoidance of "ands," spelling, margins, usage, and neat handwriting were each mentioned by at least one child. Punctuation was mentioned more frequently than any other factor. In order of frequency of occurrence the content related factors children felt were important were as follows: development of the main idea, using good ideas that were interesting and exciting, presentation of characters, completeness and sensibleness of story, attention to a good beginning and a good ending, the location or setting, the kind of story being written, and the use of humor.

The information the children in this study furnished tends to support the following conclusions:

1. Writers tend to consider aspects of content before they begin writing and while they are writing.
2. For the most part writers proceed with writing without first having made notes or an outline.
3. Most writers do not have the complete story in mind before they begin writing, but make the story up as they go along and decide on the ending about mid-way through the composition.
4. Fifth grade writers appear to give very little thought to choosing words for particular purposes, to the sentences they are writing, or to the paragraphing they use.
5. Many writers ask the teacher for help with spelling but do not ask for other kinds of help, even though they are aware of problems related to the content of their stories as well as to punctuation, capitalization and paragraphing.
6. Most writers proofread after writing the first draft in order to check on various aspects of the mechanics of composition as well as, to a more limited degree, matters of content.

7. Most writers who choose to rewrite do so in order to produce a neater appearing paper.

Talking with these thirty children and examining closely the comments they made and the concerns they expressed leads one to conclude that teachers might consider being more available during writing sessions. They might give more pre-writing assistance by helping children learn to jot down ideas in note or informal outline form as well as giving help with spelling during the writing so that the flow of thought is not stifled by concern about words that are not readily spelled correctly.

Perhaps more attention to vocabulary building and to a study of effective beginning and ending sentences before children begin writing would decrease their concerns about these possible problems. More concern on the part of the teacher in pre-writing sessions for the content of the expression and fewer admonitions concerning the mechanics or conventions of writing, particularly in first drafts, could prove to be worthwhile.

Children need a teacher who provides help while the writing is taking place rather than giving criticism and correction after first drafts and returning the writing for correction or revision. If more help were given during the initial writing it is possible there would be less need for later revision and correction. More importantly, the problems children have could be taken care of at the time they occur. Teaching at the time a child recognizes a particular need is almost certain to be more effective than instruction given at any other time.

In conclusion, it should be noted that children are extremely aware of their own problems and will discuss them willingly with an interested adult. Teachers might well consider the use of the interview or conference technique as a means for helping children learn more about the writing process and how they may make improvements in what they write.

#### Footnotes

1. Richard Braddock, Richard Lloyd-Jones and Lowell Schoer, *Research in Written Composition* (Champaign, Ill.: National Council of Teachers of English, 1963), p. 53.
2. Margaret W. Sawkins, "The Oral Responses of Selected Fifth Grade Children to Questions Concerning Their Written Expression" (Doctoral dissertation, State University of New York at Buffalo, 1970).
3. Paul B. Diederich, "How to Measure Growth in Writing," *English Journal*, IV (April, 1966), pp. 435-49.

## The Effect of External Events on Children's Choices of Writing Topics

by

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Educators concerned with the area of language arts are generally agreed on the need to teach children to write. Yet as one begins to research the topic of "The Writing Process," there is a growing awareness of the paucity of literature dealing with it. Only recently have researchers become interested in the processes involved in writing, even though much time and effort has long been put into the teaching of writing. In fact, in looking at curriculum development in the United States, teaching writing was one of the original purposes of schools along with teaching of reading and arithmetic. There has also been much research about the products of the writing process — evaluating them, relating the evaluations to various instructional procedures, and doing counts of such things as numbers of words, T-units, and so on.

The reasons for the early attention to teaching reading, arithmetic and writing were primarily functional ones. Learning to read was a direct response to the "Old Deluder Satan Act" which assumed that the ability to read — and remember the major, and in many cases the only, book available was the Bible — would prevent a person from falling into sinful ways. (One wonders how these founding fathers would now evaluate this assumption.) The need for computational skills was equally functionally based; accurate accounting of business transactions was necessary. Writing ability was needed for various purposes, including those of transcribing information, formulating documents, and writing such things as letters and invitations. Writing was also needed by those seeking to communicate their ideas and opinions.

Reading, of course, was the major vehicle by which the ideas of the times were transmitted, even though many fiery speeches were given. (Interestingly, these were usually given from a written text.) The writing of the time is an example of external events playing a significant role in what was written.

A question we should ask today is for what purpose are we teaching writing? What writing ability do we want individuals who have finished school to have? An easy answer is to say that we want people to have the ability to communicate their ideas in written form clearly and effectively. The behavioral objectives emphasis has extended this with specification,

as is being done in several states (Maryland, California and Oregon, for example) with such statements as:

- (1) The pupil will be able to write a business letter with the appropriate. . .
- (2) The pupil will be able to write an invitation which clearly communicates the. . .
- (3) The pupil will be able to correctly fill out a job application specifying. . .

In the study reported here, the students in both urban and suburban centers were given the encouragement to write. The population studied consisted of twenty-nine boys and fifteen girls. Of the boys, eight were in urban schools and eleven in suburban ones. Nine of the girls were in urban schools and six were in suburban ones. The writing was not limited to "creative" in the commonly used sense of the word because it was felt that no restrictions should be placed upon what children wrote in the time available. Indeed it was felt that a great deal of the writing should be in the realm of interacting with the environment rather than focusing upon the imaginative.

The study called for the collection of third grade and sixth grade children's unassigned writing to determine the topics chosen and whether these topics reflected concern with external events.

An external event was defined as an occurrence happening outside of normal family interactions. External events included those occurring in school, particularly if there was interaction enough with them to be included in the writing. Unassigned writing was that done by children when they were given time to write and were allowed to write on any subject they wished as well as to write in any form they desired. No topics or story starters or other motivation techniques were used.

During one week the sixth grade children in the study wrote on these topics: weather, sports figures, sports, best friend, books read, famous persons (other than in sports), and a peer activity. There was only one composition on most of the topics; however, two each were written about sports and sports figures and three about best friends. The following week, Black History Week, except for one child who wrote about animals and two who wrote about sports figures, the children wrote about "Famous Black Persons" (5) and "Being Black" (4).

The change in the choice of topics can probably be explained in two ways. First, the fact that these children were all black made the study of black history relevant to their experiences. Second, because there was a particular topic focus for the week — and because it was one of interest and relevancy — the convergence of theme was a logical result. Presumably various topics had been dealt with the preceding week but the fact that no singularly significant theme seemed to emerge leads one to hypothesize about the effect of relevance of what is studied to children's reaction to it.

A comparison of the children's papers for the two weeks reflected the relevance of the topic upon the number of T-units in the compositions.

When the third grade papers were examined, no major theme relevant to an external event was found; however, there was an overriding theme which may generally be stated as one that depicts some home-family-peer situation. Of the fifty pieces of writing collected from these children, eleven of those done by boys and seven of those written by girls were about home activities. Twelve of the boys' writing efforts were about peers, as were six of those by the girls. Six of the boys' compositions and three of the girls' were about trips taken. Three girls' compositions were about external events and two boys wrote about events they had attended.

Perhaps children in the third grade are less affected by external events than are children who are older. Yet the importance of relevancy still holds. The home-family-peer relations and events are apparently the relevant concerns.

The following are two compositions that were written by sixth grade children which were chosen because they show the variety in writing coming from the same environment. The first was written by a girl. Simply looking at its title may cause one to think that it merely is about an episode from a current television program, but this child has truly made a very poignant social commentary.

#### Good Times

Good times is a new program that has to do with how Black people are having hard times. It let's you know how hard it is for a poor Black man to survive in the ghetto with no kind of happiness just misery when it comes to jobs and making money.

Black men don't have anything to be happy for outside their homes because they are just a nobody. He's a poor man working to survive the dangerous voyage.

When he pulls eight hours and comes home and see what he's got to show for eight hours, nothing but a family, a torn down rag shack, just enough food to last until payday.

The Black man can't even tell his children they are going to the beach or fair or just out of town. He can't say anything but we'll go to the park where it's free. The Black man has nothing to say he's a man for except his family.

The second selection, written by a sixth grade boy, reflects concern about peer situations.

#### My Friend, Lawrence

Lawrence is a very good friend. He is a person you can depend on when you need a favor. I need a lot of favors.

He is very handsome. Lawrence enjoys playing sports. He is a pretty good player.

Leona is a girl in the class. She does look fairly decent. He likes her, so do I.

Lawrence and I share things. We play together but he always beats me in basketball.

What does this brief and partial description of a simple study mean for a teacher? First, it seems that if writing is ever to become an activity which can actually be utilized and appreciated, teachers must provide time for children to write. Second, it is important to place no restrictions on the content and the form or correctness of the written material. And third, teachers should include course material which children feel to be significant to them so that they are encouraged to interact with the ideas and to formulate new concepts for themselves.

## Three Writing Programs That Work

by

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A conference dedicated to the writing processes of students and as well attended as this one clearly reflects the widely held view that students do not write nearly as effectively as they need to write or as they can be taught to write. Recognizing how dangerously simplistic it is to imply that any one communication skill is more important than another, I still do not hesitate to say that no challenge looms larger for English educators at every level than that of assisting students to put on paper their perceptions of the world about them in a manner which satisfies their needs and communicates aptly to others. It is hardly surprising that writing is the theme this year of NCTE's publication, *Classroom Practices in Teaching English*; or that the theme of the winter edition of NYSEC's *English Record* is composition; or that James Moffett's discourse has become universal; or that the courses of people like Charles Cooper and Lee Odell are in great demand among teachers of language arts; or that language arts programs in school systems across the nation have adopted such themes as Buffalo's "This year the reader writes."

Basic to any teacher's effort to help students improve as writers is that teacher's understanding of the writing process. Throughout the pre-writing period the students think and explore their way through conversations, class discussions, newspapers and books, film making projects, interviews, trips — all the while selecting and recording mentally words, phrases, and bits and pieces of ideas; the teacher who understands the writing process will know and exploit the necessity of having the students turn to and tune in on their own experience, the richest source of raw material for the writing that is to come. Once the desire to write has been kindled, once the need to do so is felt, the teacher knows that the best way for the students to sharpen their skill is to practice regularly and often. Finally, this teacher will recognize the significance of feedback to the process, from the environmental and pre-writing inception through the drafting and beginning stages, right along into the revising and rewriting. The feedback will have to be encouraging, ample, and varied in its sources in order to have the rewriting proceed from the need the student feels to continue the effort.

What settings, what motivational procedures, what sequences of skill

development, what kinds of writing programs best utilize our knowledge about writing process? There are at least three distinct types of such programs in Buffalo Public Schools:

1. Programs operated on intensive writer's workshop procedures with the individual writer as the assignment focus.
2. Programs structured in traditional style, using an integrated language arts approach to writing, with the focus on "whole class" assignments.
3. Programs operated in "open style" with individual work woven into small groups activities.

In selecting one outstanding example of each of these types to describe to you, I have considered the following factors:

1. The character of the students' daily involvement in the writing process.
2. The extent to which the teacher draws on the student's environment and personal experience to motivate writing.
3. The variety of writing modes, writing voices, and audiences included in the program's design.
4. The arrangements made for feedback from many sources in forms structured to encourage improvement.
5. The conclusions of teachers and students about improvement in:
  - a. Number and quality of written ideas
  - b. Organization of ideas
  - c. Clarity of expression
  - d. Syntactic fluency
  - e. Usage appropriate to the mode
  - f. Attitude towards writing

Borrowing very superficially from Janet Emig's ideas, I will use something of a case study description to tell you about the programs.

#### *Classroom A*

In a classroom painted a deep, bold blue and bright yellow by the students, Mr. Charles LaChiusa teaches a required 10 week writing minicourse to freshmen at Bennett High School. The school, a coeducational racially integrated academic senior high school, draws its students from an area which ranges from upper to lower middle class socio-economic groups. The school is located in a middle class residential area within walking distance of a large shopping plaza and neighborhood business district.

This small classroom promises the student something special, beginning with its unusual colors and the large, full-length mirror near the door. Between the two windows, which face a row of houses on a quiet street, a bulletin board filled with students' writing demands attention. At the back of the room above the chalk board a group of giant-sized pictures

catch the eye. Averaging twenty-eight to a class, students are seated around tables arranged in a rectangular pattern. The anthologies, language texts, writing handbooks, dictionaries, and two typewriters complete the room's supply of materials and equipment. Audio visual aids are available on request.

Supporting the general program of journal and largely personal kinds of writing assignments in Mr. LaChiusa's classes, there is a tightly sequenced skills plan. For four weeks students learn to use words precisely, working through a series of lessons in the writing handbook. The next two weeks see a concentration on sentence expansion, followed by a two week study of sentence combining. Weeks nine and ten are devoted to paragraph development.

Mr. LaChiusa sets the climate of his classes with values clarification activities which often lead to writing experiences for the students. His concern is for establishing a willingness to share ideas, to work together, to respect the opinions of others, and to think positively. This guarantees the steady flow of enthusiastic writing from his students.

Peer evaluation and teacher-student conferences take place while the students write. The journals and writing folders receive the same kind of cooperative review, periodically, which helps the students appreciate their strengths and become aware of their weaknesses. This feedback gives them the desire to continue the effort to improve. Being able to type and ditto their writing encourages them to use correct spelling, find appropriate usage, and be concerned for mechanics, generally.

In the exhibit among the pieces of writing by these students are reactions that followed discussion of a film entitled "Why Am I Afraid To Tell You Who I Am?" The reactions were structured by the teacher's requirement of attention to four specific matters.

Such an assignment reflects Mr. LaChiusa's interest in combining student's attention to structure with their involvement in the absorbing experience of clarifying their values in a warm, responsive setting.

With one or two exceptions, absenteeism is the reason for what Mr. LaChiusa terms the only inadequate participation in his classes. The frequently absent student in this situation is the poor writer. Greatest participation comes from the best writers, who also show most improvement in organizing their ideas. The less able writer improves most in clarity of expression, syntactic fluency, and usage appropriate to the mode.

#### *Classroom B*

School #68 is an elementary school housing grades K-8. The language arts teacher for Grades 7 and 8 is Mrs. Delia McAuliffe, whose room is on the third floor overlooking the roof and parking lot, giving a view of the backs of the stores and shops on the main artery of the business district behind the school. Located in a predominantly white middle class residen-

tial area, the school is racially integrated primarily by students whose parents volunteer to send them by bus from the inner city. There are approximately 28 students in each of Mrs. McAuliffe's classes. She serves as homeroom teacher to one class which comes, as do the three remaining classes, to language arts six and seven times per week, sometimes for a double period lasting 90 minutes.

The room has a happy, busy look. Perky little baskets of flowers hang on the wall between the windows, sharing the scene with shamrocks and others signs of approaching St. Patrick's Day. On the table at the back of the room are an SRA kit and several piles of students' writing folders. Paperback books line the window sills and chalk trays and fill the wire rack in a corner of the room. Near the door and beside the first of the six rows of students' desks is Mrs. McAuliffe's desk. The necessary bookshelves and cupboards, lined with a variety of language texts, and anthologies and reference books are placed conveniently around the room. A cloakroom leads off to the left at the back of the room. Students sit in the traditional combination lift-top desk-chairs.

Surrounding the room on three walls are chalkboards and bulletin boards. Many children's stories, clipped to pictures that inspired them, fill a bulletin board captioned "Stories." Fables the children wrote make up another bulletin board. The title of one block of the chalkboard is "Homework." A small display area near the door is reserved for announcements and bulletins, carefully mounted or highlighted.

Mrs. McAuliffe's writing program is integrated into the study of other language arts skills. It is teacher-directed with the same assignments being given to the whole class. The nature of the assignments, however, opens the way for individuality and creative thinking and expression. Included in the display of work of these children are their Aesop-inspired fables. There are brief compositions about comic strip or TV characters, developed from a list of words that lend themselves to that assignment. Dialogues about the cafeteria menu and dialogues between parents and students about bedtime rules are included. There are opinions about crime among youths, written after a class discussion about a recent grisly murder. Every student writes a ten page primary storybook. They read their books to the younger children and display them in the library. Summary-writing of the stories read in class is an important segment of Mrs. McAuliffe's writing program. So also is the writing of haiku, cinquain, and freer forms of poetry, all with the teacher's careful direction. At the same time, the children delight in contributing to the "Creative Overflow," a voluntary collection of poems, stories, and compositions that the children enjoy sharing.

Evaluation takes many forms. Mrs. McAuliffe grades papers with letter grades and comments, after having helped with the writing throughout the composing processes. Like her students whose ideas were

printed in *Family Circle* or the girl whose poetry was prize-winning in a recent city wide contest, the children's writing reaches many different audiences whose feedback Mrs. McAuliffe counts on for motivating their interest in improvement. Her characterization of the students' response to writing activities includes words like "enthusiastic," "spontaneous," "challenged," "fun," and "encouraged." She is sure that using material that interests the children helps her most in meeting what she identifies as their greatest need: improvement in standard usage and syntactic fluency. No student refuses to participate, though there is a beginning uneasiness among the less able writers. Her poor writers respond as enthusiastically as the good writers, however, when she finds the key: a project to which they can relate easily. She attributes the gratifying amount of improvement she sees in variety and number of ideas and clarity of expression to the frequency of writing, the variety of writing experience, and the respect evident among the children for each other and the teacher.

### *Classroom C*

At McKinley High School Mr. Norbert Schifferle teaches language arts to five freshman classes. Once an all male, vocational high school, McKinley is now a coeducational, comprehensive school with training in the trades (printing, construction, etc.), the graphic arts, horticulture, and similar courses. The school, though located in the heart of the city, borders a winding creek, a large park, a busy thoroughfare, a college campus, an art gallery, and a historical museum. Open enrollment to students throughout the city gives the school a diverse racial, ethnic, and socio-economic student population. Mr. Schifferle's classes, averaging twenty-nine and thirty students, range from one all male group and two classes of 50% male, 50% female, to two classes with a 70% male, 30% female ratio.

The room is rectangular, its windows opening onto a view of a busy avenue. Chairs and desks are clustered around interest centers such as a recording area and a table for discussion groups. Two typewriters, a tape recorder, a mimeograph machine, and an overhead projector stand ready for use. In addition to various sets of literature anthologies, language tests, dictionaries and activity cards, a paperback lending library hangs on a wall with books suspended in plastic pockets attached to a sheet of canvas. The bulletin board displays are sometimes thematic, sometimes miscellaneous student contributions. Collages, for example, about "The Most Dangerous Game" decorate one display area this week.

Student options play an important role in Mr. Schifferle's instructional strategies. Students work from a teacher-developed unit that Mr. Schifferle calls the "PIK" (Personalized Instruction Kit), a set of activities designed to promote growth in language and literature. Certain activities are required of all students. Many activities lead students into small group projects that usually involve them in all phases of the language arts. Very

few projects can be completed without writing. It may take the form of reflecting, reporting, instructing, narrating, explaining, etc. A student might work on a newspaper for two or three weeks or might spend several days writing a story. Frequently, publication is the final form of the student's work, the printed word serving as motivation for correctness and appropriate form. In the sample folders from the class you will find dittoed or mimeographed poetry anthologies, newspapers, themes, short stories, a novel, etc.

Twice during the week, a student's PIK directs him to writer's workshop. In a small group he discusses some piece of his writing with classmates. They may talk about ideas, style, particular words and phrases, or they may give suggestions on such specifics as how to end a piece. During the workshop, Mr. Schifferle may give a lesson directed to a general need he has identified.

Feedback is constant from peers, teachers, parents, community — from the many sources reached by the steady stream of printed materials from the classroom. Students revise and refine their work in a year long attempt to write well. The teacher and student arrives at grades and evaluate work in a series of conferences.

Mr. Schifferle observes that meaningful writing begins to take place when friendships among students are formed and when the climate of the room reflects an attitude of acceptance of students for each other and the teacher. He sees the greatest growth — in organization and clarity of expression—taking place among his better writers, while the poor writers show greatest growth in standard usage and syntactic fluency. All students show a grasp of expression and usage appropriate to the occasion. Only the few who are chronic absentees fail to improve in writing or to enjoy learning to write during the year.

— Three different approaches to teaching writing, a different school environment for students in each case, and a different teacher whose teaching style matches his or her personality. The constants that make all three of the programs outstanding are just as clear as the variables. In each case, students respond to a stimulating class situation, no matter what type of school community they experience. In each case students written often and in many voices. In each case students receive encouragement and positive criticism from many sources at every step of the writing process.

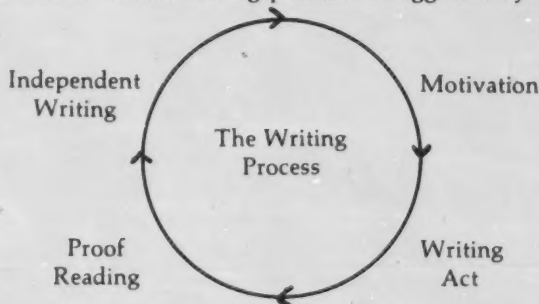
Their teachers are using well what we know about writing.

## Children's Interests In Writing

by

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As a principal and teacher in a primary school for the past two years, I have had a first hand opportunity to influence and observe pupil behaviors in the area of written expression. Based upon this experience I suggest that educators examining children's interests in writing should be concerned about several facets of the writing process as suggested by the following model:



In this paper I will discuss in turn three aspects of the model — motivation, proof reading and independent writing, giving attention to practices in the classroom which will heighten children's interest in the writing act.

Research to date has looked at topics and procedures which most adequately stimulate children to write. Pitcher and Prelinger and more recently the case study by Graves, suggest that very early, boys and girls in free choice writing have differing dimensions to explore in written form. Boys writing beyond their personal experiences will choose to write about occupations such as policemen and firemen, sports such as hunting, hockey and football and exciting objects such as jets, trucks and bulldozers. Within this broad range of topics they freely express violence and aggression. Girls, on the other hand appear to write only about female occupations and express little aggression in their writing.

Many studies have been done to determine the influence of external stimuli on the writing output of elementary school children. To mention a few, Sharples assessed a variety of stimuli including a picture, a verse, a sound, and the feeling of an object; May and Tabachnick varied the mimeographed stimuli, while Huntington used film and examined the writing produced with delay in writing, review of content, and a second exposure to the film. Others have used cameras, typewriters, and word

banks to determine the influence on expressive output. It is not surprising that the studies indicate that all such motivators have been found to have a positive influence on the quantity and quality of writing produced by children.

Writing, as a highly sophisticated form of expression involving both thought and motor skills, requires a particular environment if it is to reach a full potential. In the past, language arts programs encompassed the facets of listening, speaking, reading and writing and the strength of any one component was considered to be dependent upon the development in the other areas.

Activities in classrooms where children are creating highly sensitive writing suggests that language arts in fact encompasses two other facets, the one being *observation* and the other *representation*, which includes expressive forms such as mime, dance, drama, music, painting and drawing.

Within the area of observation, the teacher provides opportunities for children to use the five senses to view the world around them. They become increasingly aware of the potential of the senses to read their environment and with skillful teacher guidance increasingly discriminating in attending to detail. Oral language plays a primary role as labels are determined for the sensations.

A teacher who takes a group of children on a visit to a woodlot and gives them opportunity to sit quietly to listen to the whisper of the leaves in the wind, to identify bird calls, to watch the sunlight as it filters through the autumn shades of red and gold and to collect objects which are rough or smooth to be shared in the classroom, is developing observation skills which will stimulate interest in written expression.

If such a teacher further provides within her classroom a variety of expressive materials such as paint and clay and allows children a choice in their form of expression, she will have created the additional dimension which, in the total experience of the child, provides the practice he needs in manipulating his ideas and impressions, organizing them and formulating them in an expressive mode to be shared with others. The beautiful, expressive writing which visitors have seen produced by children in British Primary Schools should encourage us to engage in this more comprehensive language arts program. If we are to truly motivate children to write with the quality and sensitivity we should seek, external stimulation should become a part of a total language arts environment we create for children.

While the conditions and experiences which stimulate children to write are an important aspect of the writing process, they are only part of the influence determined by the teacher. What happens to the writing after it is finished all too often restricts or even destroys the thrill of its creation. At least some of the writing children do should be shared with others, be it the teacher, a fellow classmate or a group of children. This provides op-

portunity for the author to assess the impact and quality of the message based upon the reaction of his reader or listener, whichever happens to be the case.

If children are to improve the quality of their writing, they need to develop skill in proofreading as determined by objectives defined by the teacher and students. Within my own classroom I share personally with each child a portion of the writing which he produces. The child reads his story to me and we talk together about the overall message and impression created by the selection. We then look at the writing and at this time, I specifically discuss and assist the child in a skill which his work suggests he is ready to receive.

The following story, written by a boy in grade two, will illustrate this procedure:

The Ekimos are building an igloo. When the work is done it is nighttime they go to bed. When in the morning they will go hunting. The Eskimos got a big seal. The Eskimos ran to gather around the seal to see it. The Eskimos live in the north side of the world where it is very cold. The seal lives underneath the ice. They leave a hole so they could breathe. When the seal comes for breath the Eskimos catch him. They bring it to their home. They make hats and boots and coats out. They eat the rest of the seal. the end

A first reading of the story indicates many positive features to be valued in this boy's writing such as good content and sentence development. On the other hand, one sentence is out of order and it was this component which was discussed within the interview. The selection was then filed in the student's folder, to be retained as part of his writing collection.

A similar skill need evident in the writing of a number of children would become the basis for a group or class lesson designed to guide the children in improving this component of their writing.

The follow-up to writing is indeed crucial to the writing act — and must be a positive one, with opportunity for the child to share and refine and opportunity for the teacher to diagnose and instruct.

If the teacher is to consider her writing program to be a success in terms of her children's interests in writing, she must look one step beyond her instructional setting and ask herself two questions. How often do my children choose writing as a means of communication from a number of sources available to them? How much writing do my children do beyond the limits of the classroom?

When children find writing to be pleasurable and satisfying within the classroom, it is highly probable that the answer will be yes to both questions. The potential rests in the final analysis with the classroom teacher. Children must be given access to materials and some opportunity for choice if they are to choose writing. They will be encouraged to write at home if the teacher shows interest in what they bring to share from their

personal endeavors. I have found a big scrap book of the children's writing has been a delight to my class this year.

Children's interest in writing! The level of this interest will be determined by the teacher and the environment she creates through motivational experiences involving observation and representation, her use of the final product and her attitude towards free writing by the child. Indeed, the challenge is with the teacher!

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# Ongoing Formative Evaluation of Student Writing

by

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Evaluation of student writing is an important concern of the English teacher, important because it should have implications for useful instruction for the class as a whole and for specific individuals within the class. It can be a highly beneficial part of the student's learning program, and, therefore, of the teacher's instructional program. It is obvious, however, that simply conducting evaluation of some kind does not guarantee learning benefits to a class or to specific members of a class.

Bloom, Hastings, and Madaus (1971) have explored this problem and have defined two kinds of evaluation as follows:

If the evaluation is performed to determine how well students have mastered various elements in a postulated hierarchy so that decisions can be made on how instruction should best proceed, then it is formative in nature. However, given the same amount of content material, if the purpose is simply to grade the student at the end of one unit before proceeding to the next, then the evaluation is summative. (p. 117)

The teachers who evaluate written assignments solely for the purpose of establishing a grade (summative evaluation) and the teachers who evaluate solely to gain information as a basis for instructional decisions (formative evaluation) probably go through the same process. Indeed, several studies cited by Bloom and his associates (1971) indicate that there is much agreement among readers of various backgrounds on the factors or components that are taken into consideration when evaluating written expression.

However two crucially different outcomes often can be attributed to the purpose of the evaluation: a) The teacher who holds as the main purpose the determination of a grade can too easily fail to record or articulate the judgments that determined the grade, and these judgments can form a description that can be useful to the student. Communicating to the student the fact that a paper achieved a grade of 76 or B+ does precious little to help the student identify what he can do to improve in future and does little, in itself, to guide the teacher in future instruction for that student. As Dixon (1967) puts it "... the examiner may be asked to reach a com-

plex series of judgments, in which case most of this information is discarded when his judgments are reduced to a single mark." b) The second outcome determined by the *purpose* of the evaluation is whether the student perceives the procedure as something that will help him or as simply another case of big people with power making arbitrary judgments about little people without power. The latter is usually the result of summative evaluation. The process is without satisfaction for either student or teacher.

If the teacher regards the evaluation process as something designed to gain information that will build a description or profile of a student's writing, a profile that will illustrate the strengths and weaknesses and can form the basis for instructional decisions, and if the teacher regards the grade as a by-product rather than an end in itself, then it is less likely that information will be wasted and more likely that the process can be perceived by the student as one designed with his improvement in mind.

But even if formative evaluation is the rule or becomes the rule for individual teachers, it is still likely that at the end of each school year the valuable knowledge concerning each child will be discarded and reduced to an A or a C. If an incredible wastage of time and effort is to be avoided there must be some continuity of evaluation from year to year. As ludicrous as it may sound, a decrease in individual teacher responsibility and a "pass-the-buck" attitude may be two positive factors in achieving this continuity and thus in improving the total evaluation process. These conditions are by no means definitive, but fulfilling the requirements of these conditions would help to insure that there existed a closer relationship between evaluation techniques and the writing processes of students.

#### *Developing a Year to Year Profile*

Five factors or components of writing are mentioned repeatedly in various studies reported by Bloom and his colleagues (1971) as being important in evaluating writing ability. They are ideas (or content), organization, style, mechanics, and choice of words (vocabulary). Since these components are identified by such a large number of teachers, they are probably useful categories for retrieving and recording information relating to student writing. It is information relating to components such as these that can form a description or profile of student writing and can help both teachers and student perceive what must be done to achieve greater proficiency with the student's written expression. The relationship of these components within a piece of writing is indeed most complex, and can only be properly communicated through a one-to-one discussion between the teacher and the student, or a written critique by the teacher which may be lengthier than the student's assignment. Because neither process can normally be conducted frequently enough, some coding system

would be helpful in at least recording information that will eventually illustrate a profile of the student's writing ability and can help make writing conferences more profitable by identifying strengths and weaknesses over a number of assignments.

The following procedure is a modification of designs suggested by Loban, Ryan, and Squire (1969). Only four of the five components previously listed are included in the format suggested. *Style* is deliberately omitted because a satisfactory scale could not be identified.

Each factor (except for Mechanics, where a single definition is sufficient) is defined in terms of three kinds of written expression: narrative, description, and exposition. Following the definitions are coded descriptions of how these factors may appear in individual pieces of writing. It is important to remember that the numbers are not grades but codes referring to descriptions. This coding enables a teacher to record a description of writing performance with a minimum of time and space.

### IDEAS or CONTENT

#### *Definition*

In *narrative*—some movement of the story line. Details given develop that movement.

In *description*—a central impression, mood, or tone. Details given aid that impression.

In *exposition*—a main abstraction. Details of less abstraction develop the main idea more precisely.

#### *Description of How the Factor Appears in Individual Papers*

Code 0-1—No expansion in details of the topic given. Repetition of a general idea or absence of any central idea.

Code 2-3—Some ideas are more specific than the topic given, but still rather general in nature and lacking supporting details, examples, and illustrations.

Code 4-5—The main idea is expanded in detail and mastery of the concept(s) is demonstrated by a choice of appropriate examples, illustrations, anecdotes, etc.

### ORGANIZATION

#### *Definition*

In *narrative*—use of chronological order or some effective, not confusing, variation.

In *description*—establishes a point of view and follows some spatial order that helps the reader perceive the whole subject through the presentation of its parts.

In *exposition*—the plan of presentation makes the main idea easy to identify and there is an order of presentation of details; for example, less important to most important, general to specific, etc.

*Description of How the Factor Appears on Individual Papers*

Code 0-1—Paragraphs lack unity and coherence. No main idea, or thesis established and relationship between ideas given is unclear.

Code 2-3—Paragraphs have unity in general, because a central idea does emerge, but details supporting the main idea are not logically or effectively ordered or connected to the main idea.

Code 4-5—Unity and coherence obvious throughout, and the plan of development gives emphasis to some important ideas or details.

## VOCABULARY

*Definition*

In *narrative*—words that precisely convey actions, and the manner in which actions are executed.

In *description*—concrete words with sensory appeal.

In *exposition*—words that help to give a definite content for abstractions.

*Description of How the Factor Appears in Individual Papers*

Code 0-1—Vague, general, imprecise words are prevalent. Some misuse of terms, idioms. Vocabulary inappropriate to purpose, content, audience.

Code 2-3—Some use of specific, precise terms in developing a main idea. Generally able to handle idioms. Vocabulary generally appropriate to purpose, content, audience.

Code 4-5—Precise, specific vocabulary appropriate to the content, purpose, audience. Misuse of terms is limited to instances where the writer is obviously searching for precise, effective terms.

## MECHANICS

*Definition*

In *narrative, description, and exposition*—This scale may serve to give a brief description of the relationship of the student's mechanical ability to the assignment as a whole.

*Description of How the Factor Appears in Individual Papers*

Code 0-1—Major errors or many minor errors that destroy the effect or sense of the writing. Simple structures prevail throughout.

Code 2-3—A few major or minor errors but not serious or numerous enough to affect the meaning of the writing. Some attempt to vary structure of sentences.

Code 4-5—Minor errors only, varied sentence structure appropriate to ideas expressed.

A form such as Figure 1 may be useful for recording evaluation of each component. The same components may not be evaluated in each assignment but over a number of assignments each component should be considered.

Figure 1.

*Suggested Form for Recording Student Performance on  
Writing on Four Factors*

Student: Tom AdamsGrade: 5Teacher: Mr. Jones

| Written<br>Assignment | Ideas | Organization | Choice of Words | Mechanics |
|-----------------------|-------|--------------|-----------------|-----------|
| 1                     |       | 3            |                 | 5         |
| 2                     | 4     |              | 4               |           |
| 3                     | 5     | 2            |                 |           |

Because there has traditionally been such attention given to the mechanics of writing and because this attention has often obscured the other aspects of written expression, a separate form (Figure 2) is suggested for recording errors in mechanics. The items used as headings for columns in the forms are selected as examples of errors that teachers commonly mark and may not be the same for every teacher.

Figure 2.

*Suggested Form for Recording Mechanical Errors in Students' Writing*

Student: Tom AdamsGrade: 5Teacher: Mr. Jones

| Written<br>Assignment | Sentence<br>Fragment | Tense<br>Errors | Subject-Verb<br>Agreement | Punctuation | Spelling |
|-----------------------|----------------------|-----------------|---------------------------|-------------|----------|
| 1                     | <<                   |                 | <                         | <<          |          |
| 2                     | <<<                  |                 |                           |             | <        |
| 3                     | <                    |                 |                           | <           |          |

*Advantages of Keeping a Separate  
Checklist on Mechanics*

Such a form has therapeutic value as well because it gives the teacher a place other than the student's paper to record mechanical errors. It saves the student's paper from red pencilled butchery and at the same time allows the teacher to pay due attention to one aspect of writing that our society still seems to regard as important. Furthermore one can reserve the student's paper for comments of a constructive nature and comments dealing with more central problems in the student's written expression. It also provides the opportunity to use the student's paper for useful exercises in the future. If a particular error recurs frequently the teacher may give the student some instruction and assign the task of identifying and correcting any error in one or more of the student's previous assignments. This assumes that student papers are filed or retained for such use.

### *Advantages of an Ongoing Profile*

Forms such as those illustrated are useful instruments in a process that enables the teacher to monitor the strengths and weaknesses of a whole class and of each individual in the class. They can help to prevent one dominant characteristic of a particular student's written expression from obscuring all others; in particular, they can help the teacher see past some serious weaknesses and perceive strengths that might otherwise be overlooked.

Such simple forms have another valuable application. They can be given to the student and become an aid for student evaluation of peer work or of his own work. This is a most important part of any successful evaluation process. The students, themselves, must know the kind of evaluation that is being conducted and be shown that the evaluation is designed not simply to make judgmental statements but rather to help indicate how the student may improve his written expression. One of the best methods of encouraging this perception is to involve the student in the actual evaluation process. With patience, peer evaluation can insure that students have readers for their writing even when the teacher does not have the time to read and evaluate all the writing a student does.

In the opening pages it was stated that a decrease in individual responsibility and a "pass-the-buck" attitude may be positive factors in the evaluation process. Students certainly make remarkable progress in language usage in the early years of schooling. However, by the time a student reaches the seventh or eighth grade, progress seems painfully slow and bad habits are most persistent. To be sure, progress is not steady or consistent and there are sometimes examples of remarkable progress in a short period of time. The general picture, however, is one of very gradual development that is difficult to perceive in terms of weeks or months and sometimes even during a whole school year. For this reason it is most important that teachers of English cease to feel that they must improve every skill, cure every error, teach every written form in the span of one year. They must have faith that the English department, the school and the school system have collective responsibilities for the development of written expression.

All too often all the information relating to students' written expression, gained by countless hours of reading and testing, is wasted; wasted simply because there is no policy or procedure for retaining the information or for conveying it to the student's next teacher. The failure of English departments to establish such policy and the procedures to implement the policy means that each year each teacher starts from ignorance and must read and test to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the students in his class.

If such a procedure were followed it would mean that the teacher could adopt a more relaxed attitude toward the student's language

development, secure in the knowledge that what he has done and what he has not done will be known by the next teacher, and that teacher will plan instruction accordingly. It means that the individual teacher can select a few priorities and direct his instruction toward those aspects of written expression that seem most important to the students in a given class in a given year. His evaluation outline will illustrate for the next teacher what components were evaluated and what components, the teacher quite possibly never had time to worry about.

The concept remains that the department as a whole has a responsibility for developing the student's language usage and each individual teacher has only responsibility for that part of the student's development that can reasonably be taught in any given year. If this concept were established in practice, it would work to the benefit of the student and the teacher. The student would be given a complete program over a period of years that is not characterized by gaps and overlaps, and the teacher need not feel morally culpable if every student has not mastered every skill in one year!

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## Observed Differences in the Written Expression of Boys and Girls

by

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There is slim but nevertheless an increasing amount of evidence which indicates that the sex of the writer has an effect on the modality and/or the theme the writer selects to express himself or herself.

The purpose of this paper is to explore chiefly some of this evidence, to delve into the possible causes for what has been reported, and to indicate what some of the implications for teaching may be.

A study by Erickson observing the non-verbal behavior of ten, eleven, and twelve-year-old children at play, building scenes with tabletop toys, found that boys and girls use space differently.<sup>1</sup> Girls emphasized inner space while boys used outer space. That is, typical girl scenes included the interior of homes with a configuration of furniture, sometimes surrounded by walls one block high. Within such an enclosure were people and animals placed in static positions, either standing or sitting. Boy scenes were exterior ones, including houses with elaborate walls or facades with protrusions such as cones or cylinders representing cannons or ornaments. There were also scenes representing automotive accidents, with much of all the play scenes including danger, collapse, and ruin.

Stories told by boys and girls, two to five years of age, were investigated by Pitcher and Prelinger.<sup>2</sup> These investigators found a significant difference between the types of characters included in the stories of the boys and those of the girls. The boys' stories:

1. Offered a great variety of male characters; feminine ones were rare.
2. Included a wide range of male occupations while excluding any mention of female ones.
3. Were about wild or zoo animals, with the teller seeing the large animals as ferocious and frequently intent on killing a victim.
4. Included vehicles and mechanical gadgets with greater frequency than the girls' stories did.
5. Included a greater variety of character categories, showing a wider exploration of the external world.
6. Had a tendency to get out of bounds, to fraternize with the grandiose and unknown.

The stories girls told:

1. Presented people more vividly and realistically than those the boys told, with the tellers identifying themselves with the personalities and experiences of others.
2. Included members of the opposite sex as characters.
3. More often had small domestic animals as characters.
4. Displayed their interest in objects with greater emotion, more vivid details, and greater depth.
5. Included more characters representing themselves.
6. Maintained a close proximity to the here and now in their main interests, including telling about domestic and familiar scenes.

Pitcher and Prelinger concluded that in general boys seem to exhibit extensiveness and intrusiveness in their stories, while girls are perhaps more contained, stationary and intensive in the stories they tell.

In an adaptation of the case study method, Emig recorded comments made by eight twelfth grade students who were asked both to compose three short stories aloud and to express the thoughts and feelings that came to them while they were engaged in writing them.<sup>3</sup> As a result of this study Emig reported that students engage in two modes of writing — extensive and reflexive. Reflexive writing was identified as characterized by a longer pre-writing period, more starting and stopping, and more contemplation of the product. In reflexive writing the self is the chief audience, although sometimes the audience is a trusted peer. Extensive writing occurs chiefly as prose, with the writer's attitude often being detached from the task. Adults, noticeably teachers, appear to be the chief audience. Emig found that boys seem to have greater difficulty than girls in writing in the reflexive mode.

In a study that logged all of the writing of seven-year-old children in two formal and two informal classrooms, Graves found some interesting difference between the writing of boys and girls.<sup>4</sup> These findings include the following:

1. In either formal or informal environments girls write longer compositions than do boys.
2. Boys from either environment write more in doing unassigned writing than do girls.
3. Girls write more in the first person form than do boys.
4. Boys seldom use the "I" form unless they are developmentally advanced for their ages.
5. Boys write more than girls do about secondary territory, which includes male vocations, sports, and catastrophic events.
6. Girls generally almost completely ignore writing about themes of the secondary territory nature.
7. Extended territory, an extension beyond secondary territory, was chosen as the thematic area more often by boys than by girls.

In a study designed to identify themes of compositions, both assigned and unassigned, written by boys and girls in grades two, three, and four, Melas found that boys, when given a choice, had more imaginative themes in their writing than did girls.<sup>5</sup>

In a pilot study by this writer which sought to refine research procedures relative to the probability that children will write in journals when requested, the differences between the writing of boys and girls at the third and sixth grade levels related to the subject matter territoriality and the use of the first person singular form, *I*, were determined. In this study it was hypothesized that: (1) Girls would write in primary territory more than boys would (that is, that the content of their themes would largely be about home and school), (2) the boys would write more frequently in extended territory (that is, the themes of their writing would most often be about sports and metropolitan, national, world, and historic events), and (3) girls would use significantly more *I*'s in their writing than would boys.

Findings of this pilot study include the following:

1. Both boys and girls used the pronoun *I* in their writing, but the girls wrote *I* more frequently than the boys did.
2. The use of *I* by the boys was generally related to the presentation of information — "I saw. . .," "I found. . .," etc.
3. The girls' use of *I* was most often related to the emotions. That is, they wrote "I feel. . .," "I like. . .," etc.

There were wide differences between the writing of the children at the third and the sixth grade levels. Among the findings are these:

1. Boys at the third grade level wrote little in a primary territory theme; rather they wrote almost exclusively in extended territory.
2. The themes of the writing of the sixth grade boys dealt with both primary and extended territory.
3. Girls at both the third and sixth grade levels wrote about primary territory themes.

In sum, it appears that there are differences in emphasis and focus between boys and girls in aspects of non-verbal play and in oral and written communication. These differences have led to considerable speculation as to their causes. Stone and Church, for example, say that "the cleavage of the sexes is partly a matter of different interests and activities, but at a more basic level is built into the childhood culture. In general, boys tend to be oriented to things, with a special emphasis on things mechanical, and girls to people and social relations." Earlier, Kagan stated that "The culture has differential standards regarding the behavioral face to be exposed to the public. One of the primary classes of sex-typed behavior involves aggression. The standard requires inhibition of verbal and physical aggression among girls and women; but gives boys and men license and encouragement to express aggression, when attacked,

threatened or dominated. One expects males then to behave in a more aggressive manner."<sup>7</sup> Kagan also stated that a second class of sex-typed behavior "includes the correlated trio of dependency, passivity and conformity. Girls are allowed greater license to express these behaviors; whereas boys are pressured to inhibit them . . . Additional sets of typed responses include the development of skill and interest in gross motor and mechanical tasks for boys and an interest in clothes, dolls, and babies for girls . . . The games, toys, and fantasy heroes chosen by young children corroborate the above behavioral standards."

A large body of research on children's games and their toy preferences indicates that boys choose objects related to sports, mechanics, aggression, and speed and power roles, whereas girls select games and objects associated with the kitchen, home, babies, and personal attractiveness and fantasy roles (secretary, nurse) in which they have a subordinate relation to a male. In some game studies it was found that boys show an increasing preference for games considered appropriate for the sex and age. Among girls, however, preferences are more variable to age nine or ten. Many of the girls show a strong preference for masculine games, activities, and objects. A possible explanation of this is that the cultural assignment of greater freedom, power, and value to the male role may mean that the girls are seeking this more attractive role.

The developmental level of the child appears to have a great affect on the process of writing. While writing is usually intended to be read by another person at another time, a six or seven-year-old child is basically oriented to immediate communication in writing as in oral expression. Writing also involves some emphatic thinking by the writer in regard to the person or persons being written to. Piaget suggests that most children in the early concrete operational state (ages seven to eleven) are not oriented to empathetic communication, being egocentric rather than sociocentric. Some studies report that effect of maturation upon language use. For example, Loban reported that during the first seven years of schooling, children speak more words in each succeeding year and that they increase the number of words spoken in each communication unit.<sup>8</sup> This has been generally substantiated by Hunt, who found that T-unit length is closely tied to maturity.<sup>9</sup>

The complexity of the writing process and its intensely personal and individual nature, as well as the role of maturation in expression as shown or implied in the studies and statements reviewed here, suggests a number of implications for the teaching of writing. These include:

1. Providing encouragement to both boys and girls to write about whatever they wish.

2. Encouraging girls to expand their thinking by writing in realms other than home and school.
3. Making boys aware of the validity of being able to express their feelings verbally.

#### Footnotes

1. Erik H. Erickson, *Identify Youth and Crisis*. (W.W. Norton and Co., Inc., 1968), pp. 268-271.
2. Evelyn Goodenough Pitcher and Ernst Prelinger, *Children Tell Stories, An Analysis of Fantasy*. (International Universities Press, Inc., 1963), pp. 154-187.
3. Janet Emig, *The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders*. (Urbana, Ill.: National Council of Teachers of English, 1971).
4. Donald Graves, "Children's Writing: Research Directions and Hypotheses Based Upon an Examination of the Writing Processes of Seven-Year Old Children" (doctoral dissertation, SUNYAB, 1973).
5. Dionysios D. Melas, "Differences of Themes in Assigned and Unassigned Creative Writing of Elementary School Children" (doctoral dissertation, SUNYAB, 1974).
6. L. Joseph Stone and Joseph Church, *Childhood and Adolescence: A Psychology of the Growing Person*. 3rd ed. (New York: Random House, 1973).
7. Jerome Kagan, "Acquisition and Significance of Sex Typing and Sex Role Identity" in Martin L. Hoffman, Lois Wladis Hoffman, *Review of Child Development Research*. (Russell Sage Foundation, 1964), pp. 137-156.
8. Kellogg W. Hunt, *Grammatical Structure Written at Three Grade Levels*. (Champaign, Ill.: National Council of Teachers of English, 1965).
9. Walter D. Loban, *The Language of Elementary School Children*. (Champaign, Ill.: National Council of Teachers of English, 1963).

## The Writing Process in the Open Classroom

by

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There are many kinds of writing, deriving from the personality of the writer as well as from his purposes. Some writing chills the reader for it is wrought of intellect alone, and it does not breathe. Some is a lulling, peaceful thing, like a bank of moss with the river's music flowing over it. Some writing is graceless and awkward, some tickles the fancy, eliciting chuckles of merriment, and some is a thoughtful journeying, a preplanned and organized expedition with all pathways laid out carefully, each leading logically and consecutively to the next lap of the route. Perhaps the most suitable mode of writing for children is an unplanned expedition, an adventure, that is approached with an untroubled tongue and with no gatekeeper at the lips, so that any words hiding behind them may come forth. Such writing is no organized expedition, for there is allowance for meandering across a meadow to chase a butterfly of the imagination, simply because butterflies are so beautiful. Such writing usually has a vitality, a gentleness, a fullness of fancy that forms a clear way to and from the thought.

Thinking, reading and writing are of one piece and cannot be separated. Therefore reading and writing skills blend and flow through all classroom experience. Words are but the sounds of thoughts, and whether they be read or written, the child brings his own experience to the process. The meaning belongs to the child, and to him alone. Each can best evaluate the force of his own experiences upon which he must draw for his ideas. Therefore, it is best to studiously avoid assignment of writing topics at all times and in all areas. The child must do his own selecting and organizing, for the motivation, the personality, the experience lie within himself. *He* is the individual who writes.

In a literate culture, the child's need to read and to write is as basic as is his need to speak and to listen. Allegiance to and respect for this need is the teacher's only sure guide. The teacher must look through the eyes of the child who is attempting to master these skills, for each has his own approach to learning. Children learn in different ways, at different rates of progress, and at different times. No one formula or program or crystallized step-by-step routine will serve the needs of all. Thus, with no one specific age or formula for mastery of these skills, self-selection is imperative, and teacher expectations or grade expectations are unrealistic.

In the writer's corner of an open classroom, the child can begin, from the first years of school or preschool, to make his own record, his book, his creation. He will make his book for other children to read, just as he will read theirs. For children understand the patterns of language of their peers and, with daily experience, begin to use the language skillfully, freshly, creatively. This will not happen, however, if writing is a sometime thing, or if it is kept within the confines of teacher-assignments. It must be a continuous, ongoing enterprise, which increasingly captivates the children as their skills and imagination are called into practice.

From the beginning, children use pictures they have drawn to help communicate their meaning. Illustration is spontaneous and, especially with younger children, communication often begins with a picture and the story follows. Unfortunately, however, in most classrooms, illustrating is limited to the medium of crayon or pencil, and children are denied experiences in using other media and techniques, either because the materials are not available and/or the teacher has no knowledge of such techniques. Young children can experiment with such media as crayon batik, crayon etching, poster paint, poster batik, oil pastels, and pasted paper cut-outs. Older children can try their hand with these, as well as with oils, acrylics, charcoal, pastels, watercolor, ink, and combinations of these. Every classroom teacher can learn such techniques. Therefore, a file of illustration techniques, made by the teacher, with simple directions and a small sample of the type of product resulting, should be in the center so that the children can expand their illustrative capabilities. The materials needed in executing such techniques are, of course, on hand.

The writing center, therefore, needs the above media, appropriate to the age of the child, as well as paint brushes, paste, rulers, erasers, scissors, yarn, cord, large needles, a punch, oaktag for covers, textiles, and either clear contact paper, acetate, or laminating equipment to protect finished covers. At least two work spaces are needed in the center, one for writing, and one for illustrating, binding books, and making book covers. A typewriter, printing sets, a record player and recorded music without lyrics (such as "Till Eulenspiegel" or "Danse Macabre") are helpful.

Many kinds of paper are needed, some lined, some partially lined so that there is space for illustrations, some unlined both for writing at older age levels and for illustrating at younger age levels. There should also be colored construction paper, drawing paper, charcoal paper, and canvas. Children do not like to make their books of the yellow or green rough writing paper so commonly provided in the primary grades. Rather, they want nice, smooth, white paper, and since they need lines to guide their manuscript printing, the teacher and the ditto machine will need to provide such paper, with the lines running lengthwise to encompass more words on a line. Illustrations of different kinds of printing and binding and samples of borders for manuscript pages may also be displayed, par-

ticularly for the use of older children. A picture file of commercial illustrations is helpful in the kindergarten-primary classrooms, for one of these may spark an idea for a story, or may be chosen by a child because it fits his story.

If the writing center is rich, inviting, organized, and attractive, the children will be drawn toward it more and more often, for enthusiasm for writing, illustrating, and book-making is contagious.

The child who cannot yet write can nevertheless create his books as he communicates his thoughts to his teacher. These children may dictate their stories with the adult writing them in manuscript on book-size, ditto-lined paper. Some of these pages may have pictures pasted on them prior to the dictation, with the child choosing a page for his story if he wishes. In most classrooms the teacher may also want to make a large reproduction of the story on newsprint to be displayed and to be read by other children. However, the small pages are essential for the preparation of the book of stories which the child will eventually take home with him.

The child who has only begun to learn to write may also prefer to dictate his story because the mechanics of printing and spelling will interfere with his thinking. This practice should be encouraged by the teacher, who takes the dictation on regular classroom paper, which the child copies on to his "special" white storybook paper. However, many first-graders will prefer to write their own story, spelling phonetically if they can. This version is then copied by the teacher on classroom paper for the child's re-writing into his storybook. Only spelling mistakes are rectified, and perhaps some punctuation added or deleted. No grammatical changes are made, nor other editing done, for it is the child's story, and his language use invariably follows his logic, an index to development.

At the seven and eight-year age levels, lined paper is still essential, although the guidelines for letter sizes may be eliminated. At these age levels, spelling and punctuation errors should be corrected, but changing the child's language should not be done. If a paper is filled with spelling and punctuation mistakes, it is wiser for the teacher to copy it, correcting the errors, rather than returning to a child a much-marked-up paper. Children, if encouraged, will take pride in the appearance of their finished products, for aesthetic values and content of ideas combine when a child is creating.

When children of ages five to eight attempt poetry, a distinction must be made between mere rhyme and poetry if satisfactory products are to be obtained. It is usually necessary to discourage young children from rhyming when they write poetry. Their statements will be joyous and clear if they are freed from the stultification of rhyme. At the eight-year old level the born rhymster may appear, he who can make both sense and rhyme, or beauty and rhyme, or humor and rhyme. Such children are rare, but they must have leeway. For most eight to twelve-year olds free verse forms are

the best media for expressing themselves honestly. To confine such young children to precise forms, such as haiku, is nonsense. The child must be free to write poetry in the form he wants. The important thing is that his mind and all of his senses be attuned to the infinite ways nature has expressed beauty in the world, in color, in shape, in sound, in movement.

During the middle years the realist in the child emerges, and it is rare for children to retain their earlier creativity. Yet, the resurgence of creativity in almost all children during adolescence is well-known. The child who continues to indulge in fanciful and creative writing during the middle years is often not appreciated by his peers as a writer unless the atmosphere of the classroom is so set that values of difference are appreciated.

Part of the difficulty encountered in middle-grade writing is the obsession of teachers with the parts-of-speech syndrome, which children despise heartily, derive little from, and with which we could all dispense and suffer no loss. The way to make a reader is to let him read and read and read. The *only* way to make a writer is that he must not only read and read and read, but write and write and write. The style and syntactical structures will evolve intuitively from continuous exposure to the models provided in his reading, and from the experience of attempting to express himself in writing, just as spoken language evolves from the models provided in the home during the early years. If the models are good ones, the result is good; if they are poor, the result is poor. Therefore, it is extremely important that the models to which the child is exposed in the classroom be of the highest calibre available.

The writing process flows through the content areas which, in an open classroom, are integrated with the skill areas. In science, as a child chooses a project, he should know that his project and its results need to be recorded. This, of course, means that a different kind of writing is needed than was done for creative productions. As children are encouraged to look for what they wish to find in the science activity, record writing begins — writing which is concise, accurate, and coordinated.

The social studies has a vast potential for stimulating writing if the practice of forcing children to traverse so tediously, chapter by chapter, the texts to which so many school programs seem to be bound is eliminated. How much more meaningful and exciting it is to start with present problems and to search history for analogies and clues in the past pointing toward solutions. Here again, activity cards, from which a child chooses, can ease a child into a certain direction. He has the choice, and so he can pursue his project with enthusiasm. He may gather material from many sources (among which is *not* copying his "report" from the encyclopedia, a time-honored and still-with-us method of wasting children's time and corrupting their honesty). He then can synthesize his findings

and present a narrative account in his own words, illustrated by himself, in book form for the edification and enjoyment of his classmates.

If we approach the child's mind with humility and respect, if we provide a rich and inviting environment where freedom is highly valued and choice encouraged, if we extend to each child the right to be curious, to wonder, to remain different from others, to follow a path unchosen by others, each to select his own beauty and his own truth as his mind directs, then we will have given our children a growing place where thoughts will bloom in the sunshine, and their voice will be clear and strong in the children's writing.